

Tzedek, Tzedek Tirdof: Poetry, Prophecy, and Justice in Hebrew Scripture

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Tzedek, Tzedek Tirdof: Poetry, Prophecy, and Justice in Hebrew Scripture

*Essays in Honor of Francis Landy
on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday*

Edited by

Andrew Gow
Peter Sabo



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Editors' Preface

Francis Landy possesses the gift of loving his subject. He loves the poetry of the Hebrew Bible, and his students and colleagues must love him for that. The Hebrew Bible would love him too, if it were capable of its own emotions. Perhaps, in Francis's hands, or placed in his mouth on a little scroll, it is, or could be.

Francis also has the gift of being able to focus on a person in such a way as to discern and appreciate keenly their qualities, even if (like many of us) that person is also possessed of the multiple flaws and faults that fall to our regular lot. Perhaps his love for Hebrew Bible prepared him for such finely tuned philanthropy. Or maybe his bibliophilia has consequences for his anthropology.

Younger colleagues – including many of the contributors to this volume – who have encountered Francis have generally benefitted enormously, even disproportionately, from interacting with him, not merely as a scholar, but as a human being. For Francis sees the quality in an argument or in a person before those things are quite clear to his interlocutor, and encourages each to become a better version of what it is – to flower. It is hardly a coincidence that he loves flowers, and gardens, and the chestnut trees outside his window.

So many people have benefited from interacting with Francis – people he does not even know, or claims not to know, whose names whirl around him like a cloud of witnesses – that even a large first Festschrift did not exhaust the pool of people eager to write to and for Francis in honor of his extraordinarily selfless career, this time on the happy occasion of his 70th birthday.

And yet Francis is a selfish scholar in some ways. Selfish because he never misses an opportunity to enrich/impoverish himself by giving to someone else much more than they can possibly give back to him: in recognition, in time, in careful consideration, or even just by way of *makhloket l'shem shamayim* (disinterested debate, usually on a religious question). Rabbi Yossi offered three pieces of advice (Ethics 2:17): that our friends' money should be as dear to us as our own; we should prepare ourselves for Torah study, as it is not an automatic inheritance; and that all our deeds should be *l'shem shamayim* ('in the name of Heaven': with no ulterior motives). I think Francis is clear enough on the first two items. But some of the gifts Francis bestows are double-edged swords: they force us to be better than we might otherwise have been prepared to be. One imagines that Francis might derive *nachat* (Yiddish: *nachas*) from that, and if so, then they might not have been done exclusively *l'shem shamayim*. But that would be his business.

Loving one's subject is not an unalloyed good; it exposes one, in the academic world, in a way that colleagues who study criminal psychology or market forces or class dynamics never experience. The latter might love the work of studying those things, but they cannot (unless they are ill or deluded) love mafia rackets, rational choice theory, or class dialectic. They could hardly even love things *written about* such phenomena. There is nothing there to love, just things to study and try to make sense of. Francis and many of the scholars who have agreed to honor him here and elsewhere do in fact love Hebrew Bible and its poetry, which means that the academy holds them hostage in a strange embrace, both sweetly privileged and intensely bitter. If publishing article or book *x* on one's topic is required to get a position, tenure, or promotion, then loving one's material too much might be a bit of a bother, or even an actual liability or danger. The book of Isaiah springs to mind. Making a professional career of studying the things one loves makes one into something of a hostage, held captive by both the object of one's study and by the institution that generously enables that study. A rabbi, a seminary instructor, a systematic theologian might also be engaged and encircled in the same way. Francis is a *Literaturwissenschaftler*, a *literary critic*, and a philologist, but also by nature and by avocation a poet (and a Talmudist, at least in approach). His poetry is both hidden and patient. What he stuffs in his drawer and lets no-one read is, again, his business; but his scholarship has also been his poetry. God knows, he writes it as others might write poetry. How hideous it must be to have to submit one's poetry to the Faculty's annual evaluation exercise, for it to be parsed and graded not just by poets, or by connoisseurs, or even by the poetic equivalent of Florence Foster Jenkins (and there are enough of us around), but also by archaeologists, demographers, economists. And yet Francis did so for 34 years with seemingly perfect equanimity, *l'shem shamayim*, though the egos of other academics tend to be deeply bound up with the grade (like eggs) that each year's laying receives. To have survived in such a system – to have done so well, and to have done so much good for others – is an index of just how deeply Francis has internalized and enacted the third recommendation of Rabbi Yossi. And for this, he is to be loved, and envied, and pitied (just a tiny bit), but above all, congratulated, celebrated, and thanked.

Andrew Gow

• • •

It has been an immense joy to work as a graduate student under Francis Landy. I have certainly played my part of the proverbial simple and naïve youth, while he has provided me not only with instruction and guidance but, far more importantly, wisdom, insight, and a better ability to understand obscure sayings and enigmas (often his own). As Andrew has pointed out above, Francis has the unique ability to interact with others in more than just a scholarly way. And since his work is his poetry, how could it be any other way? I am reminded of his ritual of going to art museums or other aesthetically pleasing places while at conferences – a ritual which I interpret as a metaphor for his place within academia and biblical studies.

Conferences, moreover, are where I have some of my fondest memories with Francis. We like to present papers together, dialogues which show the contrast of our voices even as we share such a common perspective on things. It reminds me of the dialogue – both intratextual and intertextual – in the books of the Bible, a continuity of the tradition of interpretive freedom and play (בן ירבו, “so may they multiply”). Our methodology for writing these papers is to have one person begin writing, have the other respond, and then repeat the process (like an epistolary novel). In a sense, therefore, we write in the dark, not knowing what the other will say or where he will take what has been written so far. Somehow it always works. This sense of adventure to writing, this insight in the midst of (purposeful) blindness, is one of the gifts Francis has instilled in me (along with the ability to complete these papers while on airplanes traveling to conferences).

There is always a sense of mystery to what and why we write. A mystery as great as attempting to understand what and why others have written, to which the endless commentaries and books on the Bible attest. It is a great joy to embrace this mystery and to have had Francis as a guide, and a friend, along the way. Thus, I would like to end by quoting the introduction to *Beauty and the Enigma* (a collection of some of Francis's essays on the Hebrew Bible), which elaborates upon this connection between mystery, creativity, and joy.

I don't know why I write, or anyone does, or why the biblical writers wrote. There is an endless pondering over the mystery of human life, or God, or whatever it is that drives and calls us, and the urge to set it down in signs that will somehow communicate, between people and across times, what it was we were, what we mean, that will escape the extinction of our individual selves and worlds. I write on the Bible because it is my profession, but also because it is a creative resource ... If creativity is that which makes life worthwhile, this makes my life worthwhile, and gives life to my and our profession. Otherwise this book would not be worth

reading, and our profession would be a mere transmission of knowledge, without joy.¹

For Francis, every Schrift should be a Fest – I hope the present volume succeeds in that regard.

Peter Sabo

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¹ Francis Landy, "Introduction," in *Beauty and the Enigma: And Other Essays on the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 13-33 (13).

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List of Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ANEM	Ancient Near Eastern Monographs
AOTC	Apollos Old Testament Commentary
ATANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation
BIS	Biblical Interpretation Series
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
ESV	English Standard Version
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
HKAT	Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
HTKAT	Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
HTKNT	Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
ICC	International Critical Commentary
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JBQ	Jewish Bible Quarterly
JHebS	Journal of Hebrew Scriptures
JNSL	Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages
JSOT Sup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
LHB/OTS	Library of Hebrew Bible / Old Testament Studies
NCB	New Century Bible
NIBC	New International Biblical Commentary
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OTE	Old Testament Essays
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTS	Old Testament Studies
VT	Vetus Testamentum
VT Sup	Vetus Testamentum Supplements
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
ZAW	Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
ZDMG	Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft
ZTK	Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche

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PART 1

Visions



The Glory of God in Animal Eyes: Ezekiel's Cherubim and Clarice's Cockroach

Maria Metzler

To write by shreds, by storm clouds, by visions, by violent chapters, in the present as in the archpast, in pre-vision, in the true chaos of verbal tenses, crossing over years and oceans at a god's pace, with the past on my right and the future on my left – this is forbidden in academies, it is permitted in apocalypses. What joy it is.

HÉLÈNE CIXOUS¹



I first met Francis Landy at the Society of Biblical Literature meeting in Chicago (2012), where I attended his talk, “Hélène Cixous and the Oracles against the Nations.” At that time, I’d never heard of anyone attempting to apply the work of Hélène Cixous to biblical scholarship. I had read Cixous’s *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* as an undergraduate and found it delightfully bewildering.² The way Francis discussed this text in relation to the prophetic oracles in Isaiah was unlike anything I’d ever witnessed at an academic conference. He read his paper as if it were a poem, and some of the words he spoke caught me off guard, such as the following line from one of Kafka’s letters: “A book must be the axe for the frozen sea inside us.”³ For the rest of his talk, I found myself fighting tears. From then on, I have made it a point to attend as many of Francis’s presentations as possible.

In 2015, I invited Francis to address the Hebrew Bible Workshop at Harvard University, which I was organizing that year. He spoke on the theme of

1 Hélène Cixous, “Writing Blind: Conversation with the Donkey,” in *Stigmata: Escaping Texts* (London: Routledge, 1998), 139–52, at 143.

2 Hélène Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). I have my college poetry professor, Elizabeth Andrews Dubin, to thank for introducing me to this work.

3 Here, Francis is quoting Cixous (*Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, 17), who quotes Kafka’s letter to a friend in 1904 (Franz Kafka, *Letters to Friends, Family, and Editors*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston [New York: Schocken, 1978], 16).

prophecy as a trap in Isaiah 6. Francis has written extensively about Isaiah's visions; he returns to Isaiah 6 once again in a recent article, "I and Eye in Isaiah, or Gazing at the Invisible."⁴ In the present essay, I continue in the vein of this discussion by treating the theme of eye and beast in Ezekiel, focusing in particular on the prophet's experience of seeing cherubim in his fantastic encounters with the divine realm as described in chapters 1 and 10.

To complement my analysis of Ezekiel's vision and honor the unconventional approach to biblical literature as exemplified by Francis Landy, I will invite another text to participate in our discussion. In what follows, I juxtapose the biblical prophet's encounter with heavenly creatures against a more contemporary encounter with a rather mundane animal, the cockroach – as set forth in a work by the Brazilian author Clarice Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*⁵ (which happens to be one of Cixous's favorites). Like the prophet Ezekiel, the protagonist of this text undergoes a disturbing epiphany, which she recounts breathlessly and in painstaking detail. Both of them encounter the glory of God in the eyes of animals.

In the book of Ezekiel, a triangulation is constructed between the astonished eye of the prophet, the menacing eye of God, and the manifold, multiplying eyes of the four-faced beasts identified as cherubim. In tracing how the image of the eye itself is developed in the opening chapters of Ezekiel, I give special attention to the way in which the divine-human relationship is mediated through the eyes of these three beings.

The Passion According to G.H. describes an ordinary encounter in an extraordinary manner. The entire text revolves around the chance meeting between a woman and a cockroach in a penthouse apartment in Rio de Janeiro. Like Ezekiel, the protagonist G.H. claims to see visions of God in the course of this experience. Unlike Ezekiel, G.H. does not see a separate figure that may be identified as the deity. Nonetheless, in this intense interaction between woman and insect, and especially through the contact of their eyes, a kind of divine glory unravels.

In exploring the theme of eye and beast according to Ezekiel and Clarice, I at times permit myself to exchange the academic mode of writing for the apocalyptic one as characterized in the opening quote by Cixous. Rather than

4 Francis Landy, "I and Eye in Isaiah, or Gazing at the Invisible," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 131, no. 1 (2012): 85–97.

5 Clarice Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, trans. Ronald W. Sousa (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988; originally published in 1964 as *A Paixão segundo G.H.*). I will draw from this English translation as well as a more recent one by Idra Novey, with an introduction by Caetano Veloso, ed. Benjamin Moser (New York: New Directions, 2012).

provide any further outline of what I endeavor to accomplish in the present essay, I simply commence following again the guidance of Hélène Cixous:

Thinking is trying to think the unthinkable: thinking the thinkable is not worth the effort.... writing is writing what you cannot know before you have written: it is preknowing and not knowing, blindly, with words.⁶

The Dangers of Seeing

Ezekiel 1:1–14⁷

It was the fifth day of the fourth month of the thirtieth year, while I was among the exiles by the River Chevar – the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God.

On the fifth day of the month, which was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin, it was then that the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel son of Buzi the priest in the land of the Chaldeans by the River Chevar; the hand of the Lord pressed him down there.

I saw:

The wind of a storm came out of the north.

A great cloud flushed with the radiance of fire folding in upon itself.

In the middle of the fire, at its core, was something like an eye of amber.

At its core was what looked like four animals.

And this is what they looked like: they seemed to have a human form.

Each one had four faces; each one of them had four wings.

Their legs: the legs of an ox.⁸

The foot of their legs: like the foot of the leg of a calf,
gleaming like an eye of polished bronze.

Human hands were beneath their wings on their four quarters.

All four of them had their faces and their wings.

Each one of their wings was clinging to its sister.

6 Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, 38.

7 All translations of biblical passages are my own unless otherwise specified.

8 I have translated as רַגְלֵי שֹׁר, “legs of an ox,” which is regarded as the likely original in the BHS critical apparatus. The MT has רַגְלֵי יֶשֶׁרָה, “a straight leg.” From a grammatical standpoint, it is odd that a singular leg should suddenly take the stage after plural legs have just been introduced. Here it seems that the original final yodh of the plural construct noun form was later interpreted as the first letter of the following word; in this way, the noun שֹׁר, “ox” became the adjective יֶשֶׁרָה, “straight,” with a final hey presumably added to make the form appropriately feminine, as a modifier of the feminine (now singular) noun “leg.”

They did not waver when they walked;
each one went along with his face straight ahead.

This is what their faces looked like: the face of a human; and on the right of the four of them, the face of a lion; and on the left of the four of them, the face of an ox; and all four of them had the face of an eagle – their faces.

Their wings – stretched out overhead. Each one had two that were clinging to another and two that were covering their bodies.

And each one went along with his face straight ahead; wherever the wind would go, there they went. They did not waver when they walked.

This is what the animals looked like: their countenance was like the coals of a fire. They were burning like the countenance of torches. It was flickering amongst the animals, and its radiance belonged to the fire, and from the fire lightning burst forth.

And just like the flash of lightning, the animals dashed back and forth.

I should have told you before springing this text on you. I should have warned you that it is a hazardous passage. There are tragic tales of men who studied it before they were ready, stories of poor boys who burst into flames when they understood a single word too well. For this reason the first chapter of Ezekiel is entirely forbidden within certain rabbinic traditions.⁹ Others permit it to be read, but only by a sage – that is, one who “understands his own knowledge.”¹⁰ The danger has to do with seeing. It is known that the human eye cannot bear to see God. And yet despite all the similes and approximations with which the prophet modifies his spectacular account, Ezekiel still claims the impossible – to have seen visions of God. For this reason, the text is dangerous.

The book of Ezekiel itself commences with no warning to this effect. On the other hand, the author of our second text attempts to discourage unripe readers from proceeding. In a note introducing *The Passion According to G.H.*, Clarice states the following:

To Possible Readers:

This book is like any other book. But I would be happy if it were only read by people whose souls are already formed. Those who know that the approach, of whatever it may be, happens gradually and painstakingly

9 *M. Megillah* 4.10.

10 Bavli Hagigah 2.1, IV:5.M. (Jacob Neusner, *Ezekiel in Talmud and Midrash*, Studies in Judaism [Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2007], 274.)

– even passing through the opposite of what it approaches. They who, only they, will slowly come to understand that this book takes nothing from no one. To me, for example, the character G.H. gave bit by bit a difficult joy; but it is called joy.¹¹

If it is dangerous to see certain things, then the eye itself must be guarded vigilantly. The eye must be watched if we are to proceed safely. The first eye that appears in Ezekiel's vision is not a literal organ but a metaphor of resplendent light. The eye begins as a habitat. It is the fiery orb from which the strange creatures emerge: "In the middle of the fire, at its core, was something like an eye of amber (וְמִתּוֹכָהּ בָּעֵין הַחֲשָׁמַל מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ)" (Ezek 1:4).

Be careful! That is the word you must not understand: חֲשָׁמַל, *hashmal*. I have translated it as amber, others have rendered it as the metal electrum, and in Modern Hebrew it means electricity. But no one can know exactly what the word means here – that is, no one except one unfortunate young man. Here is his story, as told in the Babylonian Talmud:

There was the case of a youngster, who was reciting in the household of his master the book of Ezekiel, and he understood the account of the electrum, and fire came forth and ate him up.¹²

In the same Talmudic text, someone persists and asks, "So what is the meaning of the electrum?" To which R. Judah answers, "Living creatures talking fire."¹³

It is perhaps no accident that this treacherous word is attached to an eye in Ezekiel, since the danger has to do with seeing. From the very beginning, the eye is besieged. The eye is marked and bound by a secret word.

In the book of Ezekiel we witness the vision of a priest. *The Passion According to G.H.* presents the vision of a Brazilian sculptress. As we have observed, the ones who read these written visions are cautioned first to understand their own knowledge, to approach the text with a soul fully formed. But what about the ones who see the visions firsthand? Do the prophets fully understand their own knowledge? In the account of his initial vision, Ezekiel heaps up qualifiers, as if he is grasping for words to describe something inconceivable. As for the sculptress, she denies understanding outright, going so far as to doubt her vision altogether:

11 Clarice Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, ed. Benjamin Moser, trans. Idra Novey, with an introduction by Caetano Veloso (New York: New Directions, 2012).

12 Bavli Hagigah 2:1, IV:8.B. (Neusner, *Ezekiel in Talmud and Midrash*, 275.)

13 Bavli Hagigah 2:1, IV:9.A–B.

I don't understand what I saw. I don't even know if I saw it, since my eyes ended up not being separate from what I saw. Only in an unexpected rippling of the lines, only in an anomaly in the uninterrupted continuity of my culture, did I for an instant experience life-giving death. That purified death that made me sort through the forbidden weft of life. Saying the name of life is forbidden.¹⁴

We are encroaching on a territory of forbidden, foreboding words. So far in the first chapter of Ezekiel the word "eye" (רֵי) has occurred twice, both times metaphorically and in relation to the creatures. The animals cavort in an eye of *hashmal* in the middle of a fire; their legs shine like a polished eye of bronze. Ezekiel reports that the animals have four wings and four faces – the face of a lion, a human, an ox, and an eagle. Since we know that each of these species has two eyes, and that each of the four creatures has these four faces, we may presume the total number of actual eyes that the prophet sees so far is thirty-two.

Look again. What do you see?

Living Wheels and Terrible Eyes

Ezekiel 1:15–21

I looked at the animals. And there was one wheel on the ground beside the animals, corresponding to their four faces. The appearance of the wheels and their handiwork was like an eye of jasper; all four of them looked identical. With their handiwork their appearance was like a wheel in the middle of a wheel. When they moved, they went towards one of their four quarters; they did not waver when they walked.

Their rims were high and terrifying, for the rims of the four of them were full of eyes all around. And when the animals walked, the wheels went along beside them. And when the animals were lifted up over the earth, the wheels were lifted up as well. Wherever the wind went, there they would go, wherever the wind went. And the wheels would be taken up alongside them, for the life of the animal was in the wheels.

The four wheels covered in eyes are connected to the four creatures whose wings extend to touch each other, and all of them move together as a single unit. The creatures and their wheels thus appear to constitute a kind of organic

¹⁴ Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, trans. Sousa, 7.

cart or living vehicle. Although never named as such in the book of Ezekiel, in later rabbinic tradition the creatures and their wheels come to be referred to as the chariot, *merkavah*. Entire schools of Jewish thought would develop from this first chapter of Ezekiel, including Merkavah mysticism, which began in the first centuries CE and influenced later kabbalistic traditions.¹⁵ In rabbinic literature, the wheels of the chariot come to be regarded as angels in their own right; appropriately, the name for this class of angels is *ophannim*, the Hebrew word for wheels.¹⁶ On Ezek 1:15, “And there was one wheel (*ophan*, אֹפָן) on the ground beside the animals, corresponding to their four faces,”

Said R. Eleazar, “This refers to a certain angel, who stands on the earth with his head reaching upward to the living creatures.”

In a Tannaite statement it is taught: his name is Sandalfon. He is taller than his fellows by a distance of a five hundred year journey. He stands behind the chariot and wreathes crowns for his Maker.¹⁷

The wheels of the creatures, like their feet, are described as resembling an eye (v. 16); this time the comparison is to an eye of “Tarshish stone,” which is perhaps jasper.¹⁸ In verse 18, the Hebrew word *gab* (which may denote anything curved) is used twice, but in the first case it is treated as masculine plural with a feminine plural suffix (גַּבִּיָּהּ, *gabbēhen*), and the second time it is a feminine plural noun with a masculine plural suffix (גַּבִּיָּתָם, *gabbōtām*).¹⁹ Both may

15 For more on the relationship between the visions of Ezekiel and Jewish mystical thought, see Peter Schäfer, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009); Meira Polliack, “Ezekiel 1 and Its Role in Subsequent Jewish Mystical Thought and Tradition,” *European Judaism* 32, no. 1 (1999): 70–78.

16 Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, Interpretation (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1990), 22.

17 Bavli Hagigah 2:1, IV:13.B–C. (Neusner, *Ezekiel in Talmud and Midrash*, 275.)

18 Others have proposed that the Tarshish stone might denote chrysolite, beryl, or gold topaz. (For a summary of interpretive possibilities, see Schäfer, *Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, 40.)

19 Throughout the first chapter of Ezekiel, there is an alternation between masculine and feminine suffixes that is at times confusing. As Daniel I. Block has noted, “The way in which pronominal suffixes are used, at least up to v 26, appears to be totally arbitrary” (Daniel I. Block, “Text and Emotion: A Study in the ‘Corruptions’ in Ezekiel’s Inaugural Vision [Ezekiel 1:4–28],” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50 [1988]: 418–42, at 420). Other scholars have attempted to attribute meaning to the alternation of masculine and feminine forms in this verse. As Nahum M. Waldman points out, “Qimhi regards the masculine and feminine forms as complementary, two ways of indicating the collective, to be rendered something like ‘all their rims.’ The idea of universality is expressed by the use of the

be translated as “their rims,” with “their” referring to either the masculine plural “wheels” or the feminine plural “animals.” By switching the gender of the noun, however, it is conceivable that the author bends the meaning of the word slightly, so that instead of simply denoting a part of a wheel, the word is now aligned with another of its established meanings, “eyebrows” – since dual body parts are normally grammatically feminine in Hebrew.²⁰ It would be appropriate for the curve of the wheels to resemble eyebrows, since Ezekiel observes that the wheels are teeming with eyes.²¹ The prophet insists that these normally inanimate appendages, these ordinary means of transportation, must be regarded as living limbs. The fact that they are filled with eyes only enhances their terrifying aliveness.

As for G.H., from the moment she sets eyes on the insect upon entering the abandoned room of her maid, she is stricken with fear. She sees the cockroach as a terrifying condensation of primordial energy and is revolted by its ancient form. It jolts the refined protagonist into another world; it changes space and time in the sparsely furnished room of an otherwise elegant apartment. At the sight of the cockroach, G.H. first recoils and tries to hide herself from the animal’s gaze: “There I was, mouth agape, offended, drawn back – face-to-face with the dusty being that was looking back at me. Take away what I saw: for what I saw, with a compulsiveness so painful and so frightening and so innocent, what I saw was life looking back at me.”²²

Then an idea gradually takes root in her mind, one that makes her tremble with pleasure: she would kill. And so the frightened human lashes out at the beast that has petrified her. She inflicts violence by means of the furniture of her room, not striking the cockroach directly, but crushing its body by slamming the wooden door of her wardrobe against it.

But wait! She has not yet killed it; she has just cut the insect body in half and pinned it in place – dying transfixed, the cockroach becomes an icon that only commands her vision more insistently. She stares and stares, against her own will, in horror at the creature. Her attention is drawn most urgently towards that animal’s eyes. Like a wheel in the middle of a wheel, like a shiny wheel in

masculine and feminine together, as in Isa 3:1” (Nahum M. Waldman, “A Note on Ezekiel 1:18,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103, no. 4 [1984]: 614-18, at 618).

20 As in Lev 14:9, עֵינָיו עֲבֹתָיִם, lit. “the brows of his eyes.”

21 This interpretation of *gabbōtām* is advocated Peter Schäfer, who notes: “The rims of the wheels are like eyebrows because they are covered with eyes” (*Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, 40, n.43). Schäfer does not mention that the feminine plural form of the word may support this understanding.

22 Lisspector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, trans. Sousa, 49.

a mirror, infinitely reflecting – the lenses of the cockroach eye, thousands of tiny eyes within a single eye. She tries to shield her eyes but cannot tear her living woman's eyes from that dying creature's eyes.

What does she see there? Salt, light, her own lost fertility reflected like a shining bride. As white globs spurt sporadically from that crushed ancient body, she remembers a child once sacrificed. She remembers a man whose tears she tasted. These other helpless beings gather together in an infinite animal eye. The salt of the eye, the pillar of salt forces this woman to look back at cities long burned.

But its eyes were black and radiant. The eyes of a girl about to be married. Each eye itself looked like a cockroach. Each fringed, dark, live, dusted eye. And the other one just the same. Two cockroaches mounted on the cockroach, and each eye reproduced the entire animal.²³

Your eyes are doves behind your veil.
Your eyes are doves bathed in milky white.
Turn your eyes away from me! For they overwhelm me.

The cockroach covered with the white matter was looking at me. I don't know if it saw me, I don't know what a cockroach sees. But the two of us were looking at each other, and I also don't know what a woman sees.... The two eyes were alive like two ovaries. It looked at me with the blind fertility of its look. It was making my dead fertility fertile.²⁴

An eye that sprouted and grew like a seed. A wheel that became a very tall man.

Eyes of Ice and Fire

Ezekiel 1:22–28

Over the heads of the animals was something like a dome, like a dreadful eye of ice stretched out over their heads up above. Beneath the dome their wings spread out, so that each one was kissing its sister. Each one had two for covering up, each one had two for covering their bodies.

I heard the sound of their wings like the sound of mighty waters, *mayim rabbim*, like the voice of Shaddai. When they moved it sounded like a

²³ Sousa trans., 48.

²⁴ Sousa trans., 68-69.

tumult, like the clamor of battle. When they stood still, their wings sank down. The noise came from over the dome that was above their heads. When they stood still, their wings sank down.

Above the dome that was over their heads was what appeared to be a sapphire stone, what looked like a throne. And upon what looked like the throne was something resembling the appearance of a man up above.

I saw:

Something like an amber eye, with what looked like fire flashing all around inside it, above what appeared to be his loins. And below what appeared to be his loins I saw what looked like a fire, and its radiance surrounded him.

Something like the bow that appears in the cloud on a rainy day: thus was the appearance of its radiance all around. It was the appearance of something like the glory of the Lord.

I saw, and I fell on my face.

Then I heard a voice speaking.

There is that word again, *hashmal*, again attached to a metaphorical eye. Its radiance must have been even more astounding than the first amber eye that cradled the strange creatures, since here the eye of *hashmal* is the closest we come to seeing the face of God. Like the dying insect that commands the vision of G.H., so too the fiery divine form is witnessed by Ezekiel in two distinct halves. The glory of the Lord and the body of the cockroach are bisected. Seated on his sapphire throne, the divine figure appears as a dazzling eye of *hashmal* above his waist, and from his loins down he is all fire.

Though Ezekiel sees many eyes in the course of his visions, the prophet never claims to gaze directly upon the eyes of God. That is, unless the amber eye that Ezekiel beholds here is in fact the single eye of God, which swells and overtakes his entire upper body. It would seem that this terrifying eye of *hashmal* does prefigure the vengeful eye of God, which takes center stage in the later pronouncements of judgment against Israel.

The eye of God does not look kindly in the book of Ezekiel. Its steady gaze sears and burns. Again and again, the deity declares the same threat:

“My eye will not pity; surely I will not relent.” (5:11)

“My eye will not pity you; I will not relent.” (7:4)

“My eye will not pity; I will not relent.” (8:18)

“Surely my eye will not pity; I will not relent.” (9:10)

What can be used to shield one's skin from that relentless divine eye still staring, still blazing? If you close your eyes, the searing light won't blind you. But

you cannot close your skin. Humans don't have shells like turtles. Unlike eyes, our skin does not have lids.

Aristotle said: if "the eye were an animal, sight would have been its soul."²⁵ If the skin were an animal, would touch be its soul? The afflicted soul of that sunburnt skin would peel and itch. But the eye of God is stuck wide open. Where did his eyelid go? It would seem he peeled it off in a rage.

In contrast to the fiery eye that shines forth from the torso of the Lord, the dome on which the divine figure is enthroned resembles an eye of ice (1:22). It is as if the dome were an eye frosted over with cataracts. Perhaps this eye went blind, the one forced to stare at the presence of the terrible Almighty. In Ezekiel's initial vision, God is enthroned above a dome, seated on the corpse of an eye that can no longer see or fear him.

Metamorphosis of the Eye

As recounted in chapter 10, about a year later Ezekiel beholds another vision of the divine realm, including the same strange creatures and sapphire throne that he saw beside the River Chevar. Ezekiel is now able to recognize the creatures as cherubim. In this second vision, Ezekiel witnesses the fury unleashed against Jerusalem through the coals borne by the cherubim. A new figure is introduced, the man clothed in linen, who is commanded to strew burning coals over the city. In a dramatic conclusion, the glory of the Lord departs from the temple, riding out on the cherubim through the eastern gate.

Ezekiel 10:1–22

I saw:

Above the dome that was over the heads of the cherubim, like a sapphire stone: the appearance of something like a throne could be seen above them.

And he spoke to the man clothed in linen and said, "Come into the midst of the wheelwork beneath the cherub and fill your hands with coals of fire from the midst of the cherubim and strew them over the city."

And he went before my eyes.

Now the cherubim were standing on the south end of the house when the man came, and the cloud filled the inner court. The glory of the Lord rose up from upon the cherub to the threshold of the house, and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the radiance of the glory of the Lord. The sound of the cherubim's wings was heard all the way to the outer court, like the sound of El-Shaddai when he speaks.

25 *De anima* 11, 412b.

Then he commanded the man clothed in linen: "Take fire from the midst of the wheelwork, from the midst of the cherubim, and come and stand beside the wheel."

The cherub stretched out his hand from the midst of the cherubim to the fire that was in the midst of the cherubim. He lifted it out and put it into the hands of the one dressed in linen, who took it and went forth. (The cherubim had something resembling a human hand, which could be seen beneath their wings.)

I saw:

Four wheels beside the cherubim – one wheel beside the one cherub, and one wheel beside the other cherub. And the appearance of the wheels was like an eye of jasper stone. Their appearance – each of the four of them had the same form, which was like a wheel in the middle of a wheel. When they walked, they would go in the direction of one of their four quarters; they did not waver when they walked.

For it was to the place where the head faced that they went; they did not waver when they walked.

And their entire flesh, their backs and their hands and their wings and the wheels, the wheels of the four of them, were filled with eyes all around. In my ears their wheels were called "the wheelwork."

Each one had four faces:

the first face, the face of a cherub;

the second face, the face of a human;

the third, the face of a lion;

the fourth, the face of an eagle.

The cherubim ascended – this was the same creature that I had seen by the River Chevar. And when the cherubim moved, the wheels beside them moved, and when the cherubim lifted their wings to ascend from the earth, the wheels too did not waver from their side. Whenever they stood still, these stood still; and when they ascended, these ascended with them, for the life of the animal was in them.

The glory of the Lord went forth from over the threshold of the house and settled on the cherubim. The cherubim lifted their wings and ascended from the earth before my eyes, with the wheels beside them as they went forth. They stood at the entrance of the eastern gate of the Lord's house, and the glory of the God of Israel hovered above them.

This was the creature that I had seen beneath the God of Israel by the River Chevar, and then I knew that they were cherubim. Four, each one with four faces and each with four wings, with something resembling

human hands beneath their wings. Their faces were just like the faces of those I had seen beside the River Chevar – their appearance and their nature.

Each one went along with his face straight ahead.

In describing his second vision, Ezekiel employs fewer similes and qualifiers than in the first chapter. The word “eye” is used less frequently in a metaphorical capacity. The wheels alone are compared to the eye of a jasper stone; there is no eye of *hashmal* here. And although Ezekiel insists that the creatures he sees here are the same ones that came to him by the River Chevar, their form is slightly different from those of chapter 1. Rather than an ox, one of their four faces is said to be that of a cherub.²⁶ Moreover, the eyes of the animals appear to have multiplied. Instead of only wheels filled with eyes, the entire flesh and wings of the creatures now called cherubim are covered in eyes.

The metamorphosis of the eye in Ezekiel may be described as follows. First, a single eye of fiery metal appears. From this shining metaphorical eye emerge four fantastical four-faced creatures, which amounts to thirty-two eyes beholding and beheld by the prophet. Then, in a kaleidoscopic twist, the eyes suddenly become innumerable when a host of eyes fills the four wheels spinning alongside each beast. In the wake of the many-eyed vision, the textual interim between chapters 1 and 10 features one eye only: the relentless open eye of God, which threatens to cut down those who have betrayed him. In Ezekiel's second vision, the creaturely eyes multiply still further. Not only must we count the eyes on the four faces and those that coat the four wheels, but now the

26 A rabbinic tradition recorded in the Babylonian Talmud accounts for this discrepancy by suggesting it would be inappropriate for the creatures to bear the face of an ox, since the Golden Calf had led the Israelites to sin according to Exodus 32; thus God changed the face from a bovine to a cherub at Ezekiel's request: “Said R. Simeon b. Laqish, ‘Ezekiel sought mercy for it, and it was changed to that of a cherub. He said before him, “Lord of the world, shall the prosecuting attorney [the ox, calling to mind the sin with the golden calf] turn into the defense attorney [the chariot would intercede for Israel]?”’” Bavli Hagigah 2:1, IV:16.B. This raises a further series of questions regarding what the face of a cherub looked like: “What is the meaning of a cherub? Said R. Abbahu, ‘Like a baby-face, for in Babylonia they call a child “baby-face” [which shares the consonants of the word for cherub].’ Said R. Pappa to Abbaye, ‘But what about the verse of Scripture, “the first face was the face of the cherub, and the second face was the face of a man, and the third the face of a lion and the fourth the face of an eagle” (Ez. 10:14)? Isn't the face of a cherub the same as the face of a man?’ “The one is big, the other little.”’ Bavli Hagigah 2:1, IV:17.A–D. (Neusner, *Ezekiel in Talmud and Midrash*, 276.)

creatures themselves are also teeming with eyes, all over their bodies and their wings.

We have considered the possibility that in Ezekiel's first vision, the rims of the eye-filled wheels were imagined as eyebrows (1:18). Did each one of the creature's eyes also have an eyelid and eyelashes? The cherubim of Ezekiel's second vision are full and overflowing with their own strange vision, with copious eyes on which we might picture fluttering eyelashes like wispy feathers stretched out to the tip of their wings.

How can we account for the increasing number of eyes in Ezekiel's visions? Did the eyes spread over the creatures' skin like contagious seeping blisters? Or perhaps the closer the prophet looks at the cherubim, the more of their eyes he is able to see. Another possibility is that the change of the animals' form reflects a change in their attitude. This phenomenon is known to occur in other animals, such as the male turkey, whose snood – that flap of skin flung over its beak – extends and reddens as the bird becomes more aggressive. From this text it is clear that the creatures and their wheels operate as a supernatural weapon, since it is from the midst of the cherubim that the incendiary coals are cast over Jerusalem at God's command.

The destructive potential of the cherubim apparatus in Ezekiel recalls the military function of the Ark of the Covenant, which is also attended by cherubim according to biblical descriptions.²⁷ The Israelites appear to have regarded the Ark of the Covenant as serving to protect Jerusalem, making the city inviolable.²⁸ If as many scholars presume, the throne-bearing cherubim of Ezekiel 1 and 10 are cast as a kind of Ark,²⁹ then it is ironic that the very object

27 According to the accounts of the Ark's construction in Exod 25:17-22 and 37:1-9, two winged cherubim are carved into the solid gold cover of the Ark. When Solomon builds the Temple in Jerusalem to house the Ark, he reportedly crafts two very large cherubim whose outstretched wings overshadow the Ark in the inner sanctuary (1 Kgs 6:23-28; 8:6-9). The Ark is also associated with cherubim in the Ark Narrative of 1-2 Samuel, where it is referred to as the "Ark of the Covenant of Yhwh of Hosts, who is Enthroned on the Cherubim" (1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2 contains a variant of this title). The destructive potential of Yhwh's Ark is also evident in these tales: the Israelites bring it to battle with them against the Philistines with the expectation that the presence of the Ark will grant them victory (1 Sam 4:1-4), and the Philistines suffer plagues as a result of the presence of the Ark in their territory (1 Samuel 5-6). The military function of the Ark is highlighted in Num 10:35-36 as well.

28 In Jer 3:16-17, the prophet appears to criticize the Israelites' faith in the Ark as Yhwh's throne. The doctrine of Zion's inviolability is most clearly articulated in Pss 46 and 48, as well as in First Isaiah (e.g., 1:7-9, 8:7-15, 18:3-7).

29 See, e.g., Marvin A. Sweeney, "Ezekiel," in *The Jewish Study Bible*, ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1043-47.

expected to shield Jerusalem from harm is here pictured as the agent of the city's downfall.

Insofar as the eye of God hangs menacingly over Israel in the preceding chapters, we might presume that the eyes of the creatures who serve him are also ominous. As the violent capacity of this vehicle becomes more apparent, perhaps it should come as no surprise that its eyes also multiply. The more eyes a creature has, the more it can see and the more it can cry. If we conceive the burning coals raining down from the cherubim as tears of rage, then each eye of such a well-endowed creature need only shed a tear or two before the entire city goes up in flames.

The Dangers of Eating

Apart from YHWH himself and holiest appurtenances of the sanctuary where the deity dwells, the Hebrew Bible contains few prohibitions on what may be seen. On the other hand, the biblical laws expound at length on what may or may not be eaten.³⁰ In the course of her encounter with the cockroach, G.H. is preoccupied with issues of purity and even recites the dietary codes of Leviticus while staring horrified at the insect.

I felt impure, as the Bible speaks of the impure.... "And everything that crawls on the ground and has wings shall be impure and shall not be eaten."

I opened my mouth in fright: to ask for help. Why? Because I did not want to become impure like the cockroach?³¹

From the beginning of his prophetic vocation, Ezekiel submits to divine orders without question. He does not object even when the Lord commands him to perform outrageous acts such as lying on his left side for three hundred and ninety days (4:4–5). Without complaint he consents to eat things that should be inedible such as the scroll of lamentation offered to him by an outstretched hand, which he finds strangely sweet (2:8–10; 3:1–3). But when God commands him to bake bread over human excrement, Ezekiel is revolted and for the first time resists, begging to be released from this order: "Oh God, my Lord! My soul is not in the least unclean. I have eaten neither carcass nor torn beast from my youth up to now. No foul flesh has ever entered my mouth"

30 Biblical dietary laws are set forth in Leviticus 11 (a Priestly text) and Deuteronomy 14.

31 Sousa trans., 63, 65.

(4:14). Throughout his life as a priest, Ezekiel has scrupulously upheld purity laws and has kept himself from eating anything unclean. And so God relents and permits him to bake his bread over cow dung instead.

By contrast, for G.H. eating the unclean thing would be the culmination of her epiphany. Like Ezekiel, she is utterly nauseated at the abominable act she feels compelled to perform. As she stares at the eyes of the roach, she finds herself wondering how those eyes would taste.

Could its eyes be salty? If I touched them – since I was slowly becoming more and more impure anyway – if I touched them with my mouth, would I taste salt in them?...

But, as I thought about the salt in the cockroach's black eyes, I suddenly recoiled again, and my dry lips curled back all the way to my teeth: the reptiles that move across the earth!³²

She violently resists the idea that has gripped her, even becoming nauseated to the point of vomiting at the thought of it. Yet in the end G.H. finally succumbs to this revolting temptation. She puts herself in a sort of trance during which she extends her hand to the dying body, takes hold of the cockroach, and places the creature into her mouth – eyes, legs, wings, white matter and all. Immediately her body reacts with horror, convulsing furiously in an attempt to expel the detestable thing she has just eaten. But despite her spitting, she had already consumed the insect. In taking its ancient body into her own, she undergoes a change that she articulates in religious terms.

I who had thought that the best proof of my internal metamorphosis would be to put the cockroach's white mass into my mouth. And that in that way I would approach... the divine? the real? For me the divine is the real.³³

I had timidly let myself be transfixed by a sweetness that abashed me without constraining me.

Oh God, I felt baptized by the world. I had put cockroach matter into my mouth; I had finally performed the lowest of all acts.³⁴

In knowingly violating the commandments set forth in Leviticus, G.H. claims to have encountered the divine realm. She defiles herself by eating an

32 Sousa trans., 68-69.

33 Sousa trans., 161.

34 Sousa trans., 172.

abhorrent creature, one of the teeming hordes that crawl over the earth. Whereas Ezekiel's priesthood is threatened by the prospect of eating the unclean, G.H. suggests that she has achieved a priestly status precisely through debasing herself in this way. When reflecting on her experience, she states, "I am the priestess of a secret that I no longer know."³⁵ For her, consuming the abominable cockroach functions as a kind of priestly initiation; the very danger and detestable nature of the act make it deeply transformative.

One wonders what might have happened had Ezekiel obeyed the divine order to bake his bread over human excrement. Would he, too, have been changed?

Eyes, Hands, and Wings

Ezekiel 3:12–15

Then a spirit lifted me up, and behind me I heard the sound of a great earthquake – blessed be the glory of the Lord in his place! – and the sound of the creatures' wings, each one kissing its sister, and the sound of the wheels at their side, and the sound of a great earthquake.

A spirit lifted me up and took me away. Bitter I went, in the fury of my spirit, with the hand of the Lord hard upon me.

I came to the exiles in Tel-Aviv, the ones living beside the River Chevar, and I stayed with those who were living there. I sat there stunned among them for seven days.

Ezekiel describes his prophetic vocation as bitter, and he resists it passionately. Clearly, it is not a career he chose: that man did not go where he wanted to go. Instead, a spirit would enter into him and compel him to do and see and eat things against his will. And after the animation of that poor puppet, when the divine spirit finally departed and released him, he did not breathe a sigh of relief, free to continue on with his quotidian plans, if only briefly. No, he was like a discarded party dress after a wild night of dancing, tossed off and crumpled on the floor. He sat stunned for seven days among the exiles by the River Chevar.

So too, G.H. did not desire to encounter the cockroach and finds herself constantly resisting her experience, even – or perhaps especially – when she senses the glory of it. She describes her engagement with the insect as a kind of demonic possession or death:

35 Sousa trans., 8.

It was as though I had died and taken my first steps alone into another life. And it was as though they called that loneliness glory, and I too knew that it was a kind of glory, and I shook all over with that primary, divine glory that I not only did not understand but also profoundly wanted to reject.³⁶

Let me now tell you the most frightening part:

I was being swept along by the demonic.

For the unexpressive is diabolical. If a person is not committed to hope, she lives in the demonic. If that person has the courage to leave her feeling behind, she discovers that huge life of an extremely busy silence, the same sort that exists in the cockroach, the same as in the stars, the same as in herself – the demonic is *prior* to the human. And if that person sees that nowness, she sings herself, as though she saw God. Prehuman divine life is a life of singeing nowness.³⁷

G.H. apprehends God in her encounter with the cockroach, which itself is not God, but whose living and dying body bears witness to a primordial being that exposes the woman to raw life. Whereas G.H. imagines the cockroach as distinctly female, Ezekiel describes the animals of his vision as primarily male. Especially in Ezekiel 1, however, masculine and feminine pronouns are used interchangeably in relation to the creatures. Moreover, the wings of these animals, like their wheels, appear to take on a life of their own. The wings are not just grammatically female, but are described in highly anthropomorphic terms. Ezekiel perceives them as needy and affectionate creatures, females with husky voices, each one stretching out to kiss and cling to her dear sister.

The theme of a female who seeks to hold the hand of another also runs through *The Passion According to G.H.* From the beginning, when she is struggling to find words to describe her experience, the protagonist comforts herself and can only proceed when she imagines a hand grasping hers, for “Holding someone’s hand was always my idea of joy.... While writing and speaking I will have to pretend that someone is holding my hand.”³⁸ This hand serves as a silent interlocutor throughout the text; G.H. often cries out to it in despair (“Oh hand that I hold in mine!”) as if it were a beloved confidant or sister.

In examining the visions of Ezekiel and Clarice side by side, it was my hope that the two texts might find a way to speak to each other. Now I wonder if they may be better pictured as cleaving to each other like the wings of the creatures

³⁶ Sousa trans., 56.

³⁷ Sousa trans., 92-93.

³⁸ Novey trans., 9-10.

seen by Ezekiel, each one craning to embrace her sister. The act of seeing these two visions in light of each other – that is, directing the various eyes of the one text so they make contact with those of the other – is in the end perhaps a kind of caress, since as Cixous says, “Eyes are the most delicate most powerful hands, imponderably touching the over-there.”³⁹

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39 Hélène Cixous, “Writing Blind,” 141.

The Paper I Have Not Yet Written: An Heuristic Atlas of Biblical Scholarship

Christopher Meredith

Thought-images (*Denkbilder*)¹ are not images like the Platonic myths of the cave or the chariot. Rather, they are scribbled picture-puzzles, parabolic evocations of something that cannot be said in words [*des in Worten*

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- 1 For the avoidance of doubt, the *Denkbild*, or thought-image, is a kind of literary-critical genre associated with the so-called Frankfurt School and its associated critical theorists. It was utilized most powerfully by Adorno, Bloch and Kraucauer, though perhaps its most gifted and prodigious master was Walter Benjamin. His 1928 *Einbahnstraße*, or *One-way Street* is a sublime exemplar of the form, though aspects of his unfinished *Passagenwerk* doubtless employ aspects of the *Denkbild*, the “image of reflection.” *Denkbilder* are curious in form. As Gerhard Richter writes in his excellent book on the subject, “the *Denkbild* encodes a poetic form of condensed, epigrammatic writing in textual snapshots, flashing up as poignant meditations that typically fasten upon seemingly peripheral detail or marginal topic, usually without a developed plot or prescribed narrative agenda, yet charged with theoretical insight” (*Thought-Images: Frankfurt School Writers’ Reflections from Damaged Life* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007], 2). The purpose of the *Denkbild* is, as Adorno outlines in the epigraph above, to present thought through a lateral exploration of an image, to frustrate usual trajectories of critical analysis in order to say something outside the bounds of usual critical discourse. This was vital for the thinkers of the Frankfurt School because of their particular approach to aesthetics. They believed in art, they believed in the redemptive and revolutionary potential of the artistic. And they thus subscribed, for all their concern about German Idealism, to the notion that, as Richter puts it, “the work of art participates in crucial ways in sublating the negative presence of the infinite within the finite” (16). They thus needed a form of writing in which their ideas were not merely expressed, described and mapped but *performed*. “The literary *Denkbild*, then, is the sensuously graspable form that does not just mimetically reflect the content of a theoretical system but performs it precisely by exceeding itself, pointing beyond itself and, by extension, beyond any pre-programmed and systematic content” (17). The *Denkbild*, in short, does not (or does not only) *communicate* thinking from the past. It aims to invite it, trigger it by performing thought as best it can. Naturally, the present essay is merely an attempt in this vein, and it shall be left to readers to decide if any light is cast through the faltering procession of images it offers. The flames promised by Adorno’s comments above may be too much to hope for. However, what the *Denkbild* asks, what it demands (other than a reader open to the thinking of ideas rather than their mere transmission) is experimentation. This is my response to the form. It is also a response to Francis Landy as a scholar of enormous experimental energies. He asked me in my doctoral Viva if I thought poetry emerged from the spatiality of the body or if the body was a product of a poetics of space. This is my response to that question too.

Unsagbaren]. They do not want to stop conceptual thought so much as to shock through their enigmatic form and thereby get thought moving, because thought in its traditional conceptual form seems rigid, conventional, and outmoded. What cannot be proved is the customary style and yet is compelling – that is to spur on the spontaneity and energy of thought and, without being taken literally, to strike sparks through a kind of intellectual short-circuiting that casts a sudden light on the familiar and perhaps sets it on fire’.

THEODOR ADORNO, “*Benjamin’s One-Way Street*”²



Here it is. The paper I have not yet written. Here is the abstract, like a promissory note for a sum of defunct currency. Here is the blank page. And here is the plane ticket – even unwritten, this paper is making space for itself.

In some senses this is all my paper does, muscle for room. Not with a might derived from its potential to convey, you understand, but through the inherent force of its absence. Its non-existence exerts a pressure. Paradoxically then, the less of my paper I have the more present it seems to be, the more of my world it seems to take up and to colour. It hovers over the surface of the blank page (the blank page which, as all writers know, is not a calm, still surface at all. The blank page is not Revelation’s undisturbable sea of glass but rather chaos. The blank page churns with all the mixed-up possibilities of the could- and the might-be. It waits like primordial seas wait: to be carved up by sensible lines. The blue reservoir of my inkpen waits in the same way: a liquid anticipating daylight). But let us not concern ourselves too much yet with the internal world of the unwritten paper, dense and fluid as that is. The paper is having a spatial effect beyond the margin of its unfilled page; in its absence, it has remade my world.

For on the one hand, the paper has given me access to the far flung parts of the globe in which I might present it – Uqbar; Macondo; Penthesilea; Capris; Paris; Phyllis; Roke – and so it has turned my planet into a network of papers/cities. On the other hand, and as if exacting judicious payment for my travel, it has rescinded my access to the world, as it were, ‘right here’. Everywhere has become a space from which the paper might emerge, a place in which my paper could (should!) be started, grown or finished. My paper struggles out of the train^l and the aeroplane seat; it haunts^L the airport gate and paces the floor

2 Theodore Adorno, “Benjamin’s *One-Way Street*,” in *Notes to Literature*, vol. 2, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 322–27 (322), cited in Richter, *Thought Images*, 12–13, n. 24.

with me in the hotel room overlooking the shopping center and the baseball stadium and the harbor and the jazz scene. When it is written, it will be shot through with these precarious geographies. My lack has filled the world with fragments. If only I could assemble them! Then, perhaps, I could be returned to the world.

Thus the writing of my paper has nothing to do with bringing a paper into the world. It is an attempt to rid the world of my paper, to return the hotel and the street and the café and the metro car and the museum to me *sans paper*. It is a place too then, this paper, a reconstituted set of places of writing. This paperplace opens up the world to me even as it steals it, folds it, fragments it. Its geography is always the geography of assemblage and bricolage – that is, a biblical geography. I must contain it on paper in signs.

Botanical Gardens. Closed Saturdays

Eden is an urban idea. This is the case not simply because its (Hebrew) terminology refers to an orchard^D of the kind usually attached to the royal cities of antiquity, but because the garden is the thought towards which all cities since Cain's have looked back in awkward reminiscence. The modern metropolis might appear to deny this but a nostalgia for the City of Eden is visible everywhere: in the hanging baskets flanking the entrance to the station, in fountains, botanical projects, outlandish theme-parks and above all in the stripes on suburban lawns, which betray a nature shot through with predictable artifice. The seraphim posted at Eden's gates have stopped humanity from finding our way back to Eden. But they have not prevented Eden's memories from seeping out. Wherever these coagulate or calcify, that is a city. The city remembers Eden when it erects walls, when it names its watercourses, when it boasts of its famous founding fathers. The city also remembers Eden when it acts as a crossroads for the world. For Eden is nothing if not a junction, a tie between heavenly realms, earthly realities and subterranean forces which might erupt at any time. Eden is a prodigious omphalos. How keenly modern cities have taken this to heart, longing to find in themselves the navel of the cosmos.

Museum of Natural History

Here is the Municipal Museum of Jericho. It is set up in what remains of Rahab's brothel, concealed in the only section of city wall left standing after

the war and charmingly renovated according to the styles of the Biedermeier Period. One enters through a red-streaked window. Rahab holds court from a plinth in the ticket hall, where she watches everything over an impressive bronze-cast bosom. This heaves now only when tinkered with by the imagination, though I like to think of her coming to life and stuffing pubescent schoolboys into the newspaper bins for shooting glances up her skirts. Why they bother is a mystery; the whole of the museum is already dedicated to gynecological processes. As I said, we have entered through a red-streaked window into Rahab's brothel. Beyond the information desk, the Land of Milk and Honey is laid out under Joshua's Outstretched Sword (the rather lavish name given to the gift shop). Preserved behind glass are the soldiers' horns. The orgasmic cries of the army have been recreated by experts and recorded for patrons.

The curse of Jericho is set into the high ceilings over the café in delicious cursive script. "Cursed before the LORD is the one who undertakes to rebuild this city, Jericho. At the cost of his firstborn son he will lay its foundations;^k at the cost of his youngest, he will set up its gates (Josh 6.26)." We pay for our sandwiches in usual tender and make our way out of the café around the children's buggies. As we leave the building we see a door just beyond the yawning maw of the gift shop that looks down a corridor of backroom offices. Here the goddess of industry has seized a colony of cataloguing staff. An 'In/Out' board fills an adjacent wall. Its little crimson flashes indicate the presence or conspicuous absence of each member of the staff, who, captured in a series of awkward mugshots, peer out of the board's little windows like faces in a garrison. Against this board, with its bantam gashes of red and black, it is impossible not to see Rahab's wall differently.

24-Hour Chemist

Acid reflux. Or indigestion possibly. Whatever the precise malady is, Nineveh is a stomach complaint. Its sin has 'come up' to heaven to bother God (Jon 1:1); its problems have traveled all the way down with Jonah to impact Sheol in the guts of the earth. It is a city that growls from the middle ground of the cosmos. These grumbles create nauseating waves on the shipping lanes to the west, and its 'sick-sick' (*qiqayon*) plants infest the wilderness that lie to its east. Is it any wonder that the city's prophet is vomited up to its gates? Or that to absolve themselves from judgment its citizens and livestock must abstain from foods and fluids for some days? Surely when the world was carved, Nineveh was made of belly.

Metro Entrance/Exit

An obvious fact: the supplementary note comes in two or three main forms. The foot-variety, with which readers will perhaps be most familiar, turns the page^A into a kind of body. We are encouraged to believe this body will stand or fall on the basis of its referencing. The academic limp (having feet of clay?) is to be avoided at all costs.^B But the footnote might also be imagined as a sort of grave.^C It is a neatly contained cemetery of absent authors and its numbered notes indicate whom we should dig out of the library moment-to-moment as we read. Or perhaps the image of the memorial garden^D is better: where the remembered, scattered at our feet, sile6ntly fund the blossoming arguments above. The endnote performs a comparable function. Though because the endnote haunts the text after the fact, so to speak, the endnote also has the colour of an afterlife or underworld.^E In the endnote past ideas and departed scholars are gathered together en masse.^F (Thus, consulting an endnote can be like summoning a stubborn ancestor.^G For like the Ouija board,^H accessing an endnote relies on unusually dexterous fingers as one wrestles with the present order	<i>A. Contra to p.1, in which it is a world. Though as Tiamat knows, bodies can be worlds too; See 24-Hour Chemist</i> <i>B. Cf. 2 Sam. 9; Dan 2:33; Alight at Cemetery, take the steps.</i> <i>C. Gen 23:20; Isa. 14:18; 2 Ki 13:21; Alight at Cemetery</i> <i>D. Gen.1-3; Song of Songs 4.12; 1 Ki 21.16; Alight at Botanical Gardens.</i> <i>E. Jonah 2:2, 6; Job 26:6; Alight at Sodom, Stairwell 111.</i> <i>F. Qoh. 4:2; Located near Left Luggage Facility.</i> <i>G. Lev. 20:27; Deut 18:11; Alight at Cemetery, Stairwell 11.</i> <i>H. Alight at Kireath Sepher</i> <i>I. Hebrews 12:1; Revelation 11:12.</i> <i>J. See Introduction.</i> <i>K. Josh 6:26; Gen. 11; Alight at Babel</i> <i>L. "The metro, where evenings the lights glow red [...] shows the way down into the Hades of Names: Combat, Elysée, Georges V, Etienne Marcel, Solferini, Invalides, Vaugirard have thrown off the tasteful chain of street sand squares, and, here, in the lightening-pierced, whistle-pierced darkness, have become misshapen were gods, catacomb fairies. (W. Benjamin, <i>Passagen Werk, C1a,2</i>).^a</i> <i>M. Gen. 11; Alight at Metro Station</i> <i>N. vid. Cemetery: These Gates will be Locked at 22:00</i> <i>O. Gen. 18-19.</i> <i>P. Gen 18.</i> <i>Q. 1 Sam 28.</i>	on one side of the printed pages and the cloud of witnesses shepherded together at the other.)^a The third kind of note, generally utilized only by specialist publications, is the cross reference. These rattle down the center of the page, differentiated from the actual text by their telltale tramlines^l (or else by the supple chicane of the parenthesis). The cross-reference is thus a curious hybrid of the footnote and the endnote. It is neither the equivalent of the foundation^K or of the afterlife but a version of the metro station: ^L an underworld of possible connections: a grave turned into a public space: a central nervous system of linkages.^M In the cross reference, one text becomes necrotic/ neurotic in order to give new life to another.^N Biblical readers will be familiar with the practice. All of this is to say that all references are always and already tools in a kind of necromancy.^O They exist to summon up the absent, or the overwhelmingly complex, and contain it in order to press it into service.^P Every Academic Conference is held in Endor.^Q
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a Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

Left Luggage Facility and International Shipping

In 1979, Matthew Bennett, the American rare-book dealer and sometime watercolour artist, came across a volume of essays on the ancient culture of §, that strange and controversial geography which pre-occupied nineteenth-century academics but which has lately fallen out of intellectual fashion. The book in question was the only extant copy of Prof. Fyland's *Nomadic Temples*. I am indebted to Bennett for leasing me the volume for the purposes of my research. Chapter 2 begins as follows.

The rich finds uncovered by the expedition of the University of Alberta to the Iron Age levels of § (Site D) are, from a literary and anthropological standpoint, some of the most important discoveries of the century. The main areas of interest come from the geological, stratigraphical, and architectural analysis of the finds from layer VI, as defined by the original British excavators. Particularly important was the discovery in layer VI of a near complete Esabea-El Ritual City, one of the so-called 'Flat Cities' of the § peninsula. These conurbations were entirely two dimensional. They were inscribed – 'written' – life-sized into the ground and 'inhabited' during only four days for the year, just before the winter solstice. After this time, these flat cities were deserted and the §ers returned to their usual nomadic lifestyle.

From the available evidence (ceramics, textiles, simple utensils) it seems that their creators occupied these virtual cities as if they were not virtual at all. Inhabitants slept, worked and even commuted according to the written lines of the metropolis. The cities boast domestic, economic and military quarters. Public spaces were generous and thoroughfares of various sizes and functions crisscrossed the metropolis in more-or-less efficient lines. We know from the evidence amassed elsewhere on the peninsula (Layer IX of Site B and layer II of Sites E and E^a for example) that each year the diagrammatic city entirely changed in layout, logic and architecture. The only constant feature in the cities is that at the center of each Esabea-El City sits a huge library.^F Arranged in aisles, the populus seems to have used this central space to organise each conurbation and there they stored vast numbers of texts, which travelled with them for the rest of their year.³

3 Prof. X. Fyland, *Essays on the Written Landscapes of The § Peninsula* (London: Goit and Lambard, 1947), 22-23.

Consensus among § scholars is that the written landscape was part of an astrological rite linked to the winter solstice. Fyland's theories were more outlandish. He claimed that these fleeting cities formed part of an ongoing attempt to solve a theological problem by means of a series of conceptual metropolises: cosmic ethics as imagined through urban space. "This should not surprise us," he wrote, "for this is the nature of all cities. Each city resembles the labyrinthine coils of the brain; through it we struggle to work something out in the lived space of ourselves. While we convert that lived space into signs (writing, argument, story), the §ers sought to convert it directly into an inhabitable world."

Prof. Fyland's demise is a well-known story in modern University circles. The man who became obsessed with the linkages between the § peninsula and conceptual space vanished suddenly while at a conference in the United States. His collected works were found piled up in the center of his hotel room and a series of transcriptions of § stele were recovered from his bedside. To this day, chamber maids of the Grand Historia Hotel in San Diego whisper that Fyland disappeared into his own translations, like the famous Chinese painter who vanished into his paintings.

Condemned Structure. Keep Out

I can't imagine the city of Babel without thinking of the human throat. First and most obviously, this is because Babel is the city of language and the larynx; in Babel all citizens communicate freely and in the common primordial tongue. Speech thus has the status of a public space. How convenient then that the city's literal public space also resembles a throat: a huge vertiginous structure designed to gulp down the heavenly host or else to vomit out humanity among the stars. This gullet of a building only arises in fact because of the shared language in the mouths of its populace; and, in turn, their shared language is destroyed because of the emerging structure. What is the significance of this? We might say that Babel is a city whose physical arrangements are contingent upon its linguistic ones, a public architecture mirroring a semiotic structure. Or, in other words, Babel has Lacan as its patron saint; its subconscious life and its public facades are both built with semiotics. What a frightening place this Babel must have been with its perfect prose, its total contiguity of thought, its utter lack of translation – and so of poetry. No wonder the city wanted a name for itself, the old nouns having worn thin from overuse. No wonder the city wanted to build a throat through which it could falteringly speak to alien realms.

There is a man in the square with writer's block. He does not yet realize he has been blessed by visiting angels.

Couriers, Ring for Assistance

I

Forget its delicious reputation for sexual deviance, Sodom is the city of the line. It's full of them, crossed hither and thither with thresholds. As Paris has fine architecture or London imperial pomp, just as Gotham has crime and New York has King Kong, or Mr. Peanut, or the Stay Puft Marshmallow Man (all transpositions, surely, of the gargantuan possibilities that exist for enlarging one's Self in the Big Apple), Sodom has lines. The sex or the inhospitality – whatever you'd rather – each is necessarily secondary. For what kind of sex is there without crossings? What manner of welcome? The celestial city and the carnal Sodom are only second-generation myths. They are the impressions left behind by a more fundamental and more common magic: the scribbling of lines in the dust. This not that; here not there; us not them. Sodom: margin, edge, sphincter. Sodom: *anus mundi*.^o

II

Lot's household represents the failure of history. The man plotting forward, always forward, in the hope of sheltering under progress: camps to houses to unscathed cities of the plain. Like history, he is the opportunistic watcher at the gate of comings and goings; like history, he falls apart only when he contracts amnesia. Lot's wife is more overtly retrospective and of course that's what does for her in the end. She is turned into a sculpture that commemorates the failure of the backwards glance. History often lapses into art when it becomes genuinely interested in the past. History entertains angels unawares and must be saved by the men it seeks to guard. History is nothing if not deeply incestuous: in public it is allied to all that looks back and is preserved, but in secret, in the fecund places of itself, it is intoxicated with itself. It hoards itself within itself, like Lot's daughters carrying Lot's sons in their wombs.^o

III

At the opening of his *Envois*, Jacques Derrida says that one might read his work as the preface to a book that that he has not yet written, or 'as the remainders of a recently destroyed correspondence. Destroyed by fire or by that which figuratively takes its place'. His volume is both an infant-text that anticipates the homeland of a book not-yet written and, at the same time, a ghost-text that remembers its previous life as letter now consigned to the flames. There is only

one further place I can recall where we encounter at once the unborn heir to the unfound homeland and the refugee fleeing destruction by fire. That is in Genesis 18 and 19. In the glossary penned for the volume by his translator (one Alan Bass), the following lengthy exploration is recorded as the entry for the word '*envoi*' itself. I cannot help but see the embers of Isaac and Sodom in there, and the grains of Lot's family too:

*envoi, envoyer: envoyer, to send, is derived from the Latin *inviare*, to send on the way. The root word here is *via*, whence the English *via*, the French *voie*, and of course the Italian *via*, which all have the sense of 'way'; see also *chemin*. The noun *envoi* can mean the action of sending (*envoi de lettres*: the sending of letters), kickoff (as in the start of a football game), something that is sent (especially in the senses of message, missive, or dispatch), the concluding stanza of a ballad that typically serves as a dedication, the lines handwritten by the author of a book as part of a dedication, and, in the legal sense (*envoi en possession*), the right to enter into possession of an inheritance (see *legs*).... The reflexive verb *s'envoyer* is particularly important. It can mean to send oneself, transitively or intransitively (see also under *a* and *carte*). In the latter sense, one might say that if one sends oneself, the one's en-voy (also *en-voi*) or representative has to be one's double or ghost. This idea speaks to the relations between oneself and one's heirs, to whom one sends oneself via inheritance. The transitive sense of *s'envoyer* has a special slang sense in French. 'To send oneself someone' in this sense means to provide oneself with someone for sexual purposes. What can or cannot be sent, by oneself or to oneself, in all these senses? A child (see *enfant*), for instance?⁴*

Panorama of Kireath Sepher

I

Once the great nouveau weapon of the age, the submarine is today preserved on the High Street in the guise of the franchise coffee house. Do not let this apparently amiable outlet with its unguents, stencils and perfumed beans charm you into thinking that its principal activity is high art or magic, or, still further from the truth: catering. This is a contraption of war and the masters-at-arms confirm the fact each and every time an order is taken up by the till and echoed down the chain of aprons. '*Up periscope!*' '*Up periscope!*' '*Full ahead!*' '*Full Ahead.*' '*Skinny Cap, extra foam, extra hot. No sprinkles. Come about. All*

4 Jacques Derrida, *The Postcard: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), xxi.

stop! This mechanical repetition, the most pragmatic of safeguards on communication, can always be found in society where the message matters most. And just as it once thrived in radar rooms and on ships' bridges it is now practiced in branches of Starbucks (to keep the naval theme). Amongst the pipes hissing steam, the constant dripping and streaming of water, and the claustrophobic quarters where the plucky and uniformed youth must undergo all sorts of intimate acrobatics to pass by others in the course of their duties, we find the submarine re-imagined as the insidious drinks-chain. Nowadays, ultimate power does not reside in the torpedo tube but in cylinders of loose change which move with all the smooth sudden power of a missile bay in recoil. What is produced on the High Street is a frothy live-wire product, made at speed and under intense supervision.

At the back of the room, around ill-suited tables, is held a University Department's 'Unit of Assessment' meeting, where research is organized before being submitted (as 'REF') to government-sponsored scrutiny.^f Before the chair calls order, the quorum, as one, blows steam from their insulated cups. Each item on the agenda is repeated carefully before constrained discussion ensues. They discuss whether biblical scholarship can demonstrate cultural and economic 'Impact'. *Moby Dick* stares out at them from the sides of their cups. After an interval of a few months, the UoA's outputs emerge as caffeinated innovations, with their owner's identity misrepresented on the back via the publisher's blurb. These tap into vast revenues whose relationship with the tax system is complex. What is produced is a live-wire, frothy product – for it is made at speed under constant supervision. Via teaching, these published products provide the aspiring middle class with the stylistic assurance that they are part of the bourgeoisie – like an overpriced beverage.

II

The spell of security is overwhelming. The magic that binds us to the academic job is nothing less than a mythology of caste. The sheen, slick and slow, emanating from door signs and the sea of departmental safety glass blinds us to its power. The need to keep the surfaces of life coherent is the principal concern, to produce a ripple-less space – like the published page, through which the commas and colons stare out as if from a display case. This same stare paints the face of the traditional biblical philologist, tenured in position. These individuals trade twenty minutes of writing as a coupon for plane tickets and see the world through eye-holes cut in conference programmes. They are humanities scholars. The human experience is their concern. Life, however, must be banished from their midst. Their scholarship? An exorcism. Step back from the Ouija,^g then. We'll get fingerprints on the glass.

III

The Head of Department welcomes Freshers into the tiered seating of the triage ward. Her staff, who will shortly commence a series of rapid assessments, stand quietly by. The immediate aim is to make the intake as comfortable as possible. Following minimal consultation, a series of Learning Objectives are prescribed, their strength carefully managed by central regulation. Lectures will place the patients under chloroform. Academic outputs are administered by the lamp of the theatre's projector. Naturally, the doctor wears clothes that keep to a minimum the risk of infection from the outside world. He dispenses neat capsules from Library repositories to support his work – one must be careful to complete the course. In time, broken prose will be extracted from the student body at length and with considerable discomfort. Grades suture the wounds and each leaves for the front with a certificate of status.

Next Junction, No Right Turn

The Song of Songs, that great paean to flushed erotic love pressed into the middle of the Bible (like a centerfold in a fifth-former's York Notes), has its own city. It is a murky and unnamed conurbation and though various theories exist as to its identity, I prefer to let it keep its mask. Presumably the road signs are blacked out to protect the identities of the clandestine lovers themselves, whose trysts so often take place under the cover of darkness. Their voices seems to have been dubbed over with those of actors for the same reasons of anonymity: kings, shepherds and soldiers, gaia and gazelles: all these stand up for the blindness, the opacity of love. It is a city that we only see at night. Our heroine is awake while the city sleeps. She misses her lover whom she cannot find in the tangled sheets (or did she sent him away during foreplay? She can't remember). She flies from her home to comb the place. She searches the souks; she searches the open squares; she parlays with the watchmen on their rounds. These sentinels ignore her. Or do they beat and expose her? She can't remember. In either case, she chances upon her love, and disappears with him – to her home, to her room and to her ancestral bed, the surface on which she herself was conceived. Or does she follow him into a garden? She can't remember (Song 3:5). Is this amnesia or is it self-plagiarism?

The Song's forgetful city is the image of a labyrinth. In the labyrinth I am caught. Do I go forwards or do I turn back to remake an earlier choice? I am pressed under the cumulative weight of my own shaky decisions – Left? Right? Straight on? – trapped somewhere between the memory of an entrance and the blind hope of a center. Even trying to unmake my decisions, unpicking the suddenly uncertain gleam of Ariadne's thread, does not, it turns out, undo my choices at all. Retracing my steps simply adds to the patchwork of indecision

and failed memory. Now I am doubting myself, a once fixed point in the hall of broken mirrors. Yes, there is a certain kind of terror that can come alive only in the maze or in the walled city late at night, where one finds oneself cast adrift between the emotions attached to being lost and those of being imprisoned. In the labyrinth we mix the desire for a prize with the fear of the puzzle. The labyrinth endlessly duplicates until the common becomes alien, until the usual shocks us by means of its familiarity. Entanglement and abandonment lose their distinctions. Thus in the labyrinth, as in the maze-like patina of the tell-tale fingerprint, I am both thrillingly embodied and painfully depersonalized. The resident is cast in the same mould as the refugee. Both read their world, as the Song's characters do, like the lover on a first date – with the thrilling fear that they might be reading a text they have already fallen inside.

Cemetery: These Gates will be Locked at 22:00

I

In his masterwork on *Kabbalah*, Gershom Scholem writes the following on the subject of the golem:

For obviously a man who creates a golem is in some sense competing with God's creation of Adam.... This Adam was taken from the centre and the navel of the earth, but all the elements were combined in his creation. From everywhere God gathered the dust from which Adam was to be made, and etymologies interpreting the word Adam as an abbreviation of his elements, or of the names of the four cardinal points from which he was taken, gained wide currency [via the Talmudic Aggadah and Genesis Rabbah].⁵

The golem is perhaps the strangest of the monster genus. Frankenstein's monster is made of defunct humanity and animated by a manipulation of nature; the zombie is communal humanity gone wrong – either through money or voodoo (if one can tell the difference). Cyborgs emerge because of a blind thirst for connectivity. The golem is different because it is a literary monster. It is a tellurian being animated through the energy of sacred letters. In other words, the golem is the product of combining the power of space with the power text. Perhaps this explains in part why the golems of literature rarely speak. The golem is itself an act of speechcraft (its creator is an *Amora*, an utterer) so how could it, a language, have a language of its own? What language

5 Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, trans. Ralph Manheim (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1965), 159.

would a language speak? The golem has a loop of logic, a self-reference,¹¹ instead of a throat. The golem is also an act of terraforming, however: a mobilization of the land. In the later Prague tradition, the golem comes into being to protect the land, the ghetto (itself a finitude of space that draws its life from sacred letters).⁶ Once safe, this land accepts the golem back into its cloying arms.⁷ All golems inevitably return in this way to the status of clay, blotchy fragments with only the memory of being fired into a corpus. To their writers, all texts are golems.

II

Walter Benjamin once wrote that “memory is not an instrument for surveying the past but its theater. It is the medium of past experience, just as the earth is the medium in which dead cities lie buried.”^c He who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging.”⁷ By this schema one wonders how we are to imagine the spade. If memory is not the instrument but the medium, what is the instrument after all? For Benjamin a likely answer would be the analogic image, the emblem. For nothing peels back the sediment of memory as effectively as the sharp edges of a myth in pieces.

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7 From ‘Excavation and Memory’, written ca. 1932, unpublished in Benjamin’s lifetime. *Gesammelte Schriften*, IV, 400–401. Translated by Rodney Livingstone, on the basis of a prior version by Edmund Jephcott; included in *Selected Writings*, II, eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 576.

PART 2

Isaiah



Isaiah's Interview

Keith Bodner

With the smouldering ruins of the northern kingdom in the backdrop, the Assyrian juggernaut approaches the city of Jerusalem in 2 Kings 18-19 poised for destruction.¹ Although Hezekiah is a model of piety, his shifting policies of rebellion and submission to Sennacherib eventually result in the threatening words of the Rabshakeh that forecast certain doom for the city. The prophet Isaiah has not been mentioned previously in the Kings narrative, but in chapter 19 his bold oracles counter the Assyrian utterances, culminating in a spectacular deliverance that hardly could have been imagined. Yet the end of Hezekiah's career features some unusual developments: after recovering from an illness, the king's hospitality to a Babylonian delegation prompts an uninvited visit from the same prophet Isaiah, whose scathing interview in 2 Kings 20:14-18 includes a bleak announcement of future captivity for Hezekiah's descendants. The king's response to this oracle in 20:19 seems to publicly accept the pronouncement, but in a private aside Hezekiah sounds relieved that his own future will be peaceful: "Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, 'The word of the LORD that you have spoken is good.' For he thought, 'Why not, if there will be peace and security in my days?'" (NRSV). As the last utterance of Hezekiah's eventful career, this difficult line merits careful scrutiny. Walter Dietrich remarks that the king's reaction to Isaiah's word is "feather-headed," whereas David Bostock believes that Hezekiah is "depicted as a man of discernment."² How is it that such assiduous commentators – who are both skilled readers and take the text seriously – can arrive at such antithetical conclusions? After surveying several important moments in the preceding storyline, this essay will explore several options for interpreting this concluding episode in Hezekiah's career, and analyze how it contributes to the final sector of the Deuteronomistic History as the destruction of Jerusalem gradually assumes center stage.

1 It is an honor to dedicate this essay to Francis Landy, appreciating his long-standing interest in the figure of Isaiah and our many conversations about the book of Kings.

2 Walter Dietrich, "1 & 2 Kings," in *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, eds. John Barton and John Muddiman (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2001), 262; David Bostock: *A Portrayal of Trust: The Theme of Faith in the Hezekiah Narratives* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), 145.

The External Crisis

The Assyrian advance toward the land of Israel is first mentioned in 2 Kings 15:19-20, and steadily increases until the decimation of the northern kingdom in the reign of Hoshea: the actual destruction is swiftly recorded in a mere handful of verses, whereas the theological rationale is narrated at length in 2 Kings 17. Among the many questions that surface in this section of the Deuteronomistic History involve the survival of the southern kingdom in light of the Assyrian onslaught: how will Judah fare without the northern buffer zone, and if the north was so soundly defeated, what hope is there for the south? After the calamitous careers of Manasseh and Amon in Jerusalem during this chaotic period, the advent of Hezekiah is a rare bright spot in the royal history so far. Following the long deuteronomic sermon about the consequences of not trusting in God and building a legion of high places, Hezekiah is commended for his trust (18:4) and inaugurates a program of destroying the high places (18:5), and has success in battle against the Philistines (who have somehow returned after a lengthy narrative absence; 18:9). Hezekiah's sweeping reforms are without precedent in the narrative, probably creating positive expectations for his career in the mind of the reader.

If the reader is expecting an era of relative peace on account of Hezekiah's piety, then such expectations are abruptly undermined with the arrival of the Assyrian army within striking range of Jerusalem. Furthermore, even though Hezekiah had divested the temple of its gold he is nonetheless denigrated by the fearsome Rabshakeh, whose intimidating rhetoric includes a warning to citizens that Hezekiah is a deceiver because he claims that God will deliver the city. Within this long and complex account of the Assyrian crisis in 2 Kings 18-19, there are three areas of the story that merit comment for the purposes of this essay. First, Hezekiah's reaction to this dire situation facing Jerusalem is to pray within the precincts of the temple and send for Isaiah the prophet (19:1-2), and he prays again later in the chapter (vv. 14-19) in response to the threatening letter he receives. For a king to seek out a prophet in the book of Kings – usually it is the other way around – is not a common occurrence. While it is true that Hezekiah has few options, nonetheless the combination of prayer and prophetic invitation must be interpreted as positive, and serves to frame Hezekiah in a favorable light.

Second, Isaiah's involvement in 2 Kings 19 is reminiscent of Nathan in the court of David: both have multiple appearances, arrive in the court both at the king's request *and* unbidden, and both speak remarkable oracles with far-reaching consequences. Hezekiah hears Isaiah's poetic anticipation of deliverance and witnesses firsthand the fulfillment, and because of this acquaintance with

the power and veracity of the prophetic word, he would be wise to take any further words of Isaiah with the utmost seriousness. Earlier, David had the same experience with Nathan's oracles, and the reader recalls that Nathan also had personal rebukes for the king along with astonishing promises. Hezekiah will receive a more personal word from Isaiah as we proceed, so the comparison with Nathan should be kept in mind. Third, Sennacherib's final demise in Nineveh (19:37) has a number of purposes in the narrative. There is a certain irony in his grim fate: Hezekiah prayed for help in the Jerusalem temple and is rescued from the Assyrian threat, but Sennacherib is struck down *by his own sons* while praying to Nisroch in a temple. But this stunning reversal of fortune obliquely draws attention to the theme of *royal offspring*, and it should be noted that the second half of 2 Kings 20 is very much concerned with the descendants of Hezekiah and the fate of his progeny. So Sennacherib's demise might well be interpreted as a moment of triumph and (quite literally) poetic justice for his hubris, but it also introduces a moment of pause in the narrative as attention switches back to Hezekiah in chapter 20. Jerusalem has been rescued, but Hezekiah's complications are far from over.

The Internal Crisis

It is possible that there is a temporal dislocation at the outset of 2 Kings 20 ("In those days," *בִּימֵי הָהֵם*), and through a flashback we discover that Hezekiah has been plagued by more than just the Assyrians: he has a mortal illness, and the prophet Isaiah announces his imminent death. A correlation is therefore attached between the two events, and so the reader is invited to imaging a double crisis: as the Assyrians threaten without, he has an illness within, and hence he is under siege and threatened by death on multiple fronts. Admittedly there are host of peculiar episodes in the Deuteronomistic History, and Hezekiah's travails in 2 Kings 20:1-11 must rank among them. Faced with the grim announcement, Hezekiah pleads his case to God, only to have Isaiah promptly return with an extension of fifteen years of life and deliverance of the city (which is why vv. 1-11 appear to be a flashback to the time of the invasion), before the episode concludes with a strange poultice remedy and a sign of the shadow.³ Again for the purposes of this essay there are three relevant points from this episode. First, it should be underscored that the Davidic promise prompts the divine word about delivering the city (v. 6), and while Hezekiah's

3 On the calculations that co-ordinate the time of Hezekiah's illness to the time of the Assyrian crisis, see T.R. Hobbs, *2 Kings* (WBC 13; Waco: Word, 1985), 288-90.

reforms and his trust in God are commendable (18:3-6), the rescue from Assyria is predicated on divine commitment to the line of David.⁴ This commitment continues the theme of *royal offspring* that is discernable in the scene of Sennacherib's demise, and certainly focuses on Hezekiah's immediate future as well.

Second, when Isaiah returns with an optimistic word after Hezekiah weeps and prays, the reader might be uncertain about how to interpret the king's subsequent request for a sign in v. 8: "It is remarkable after such a resounding and reassuring oracle by the prophet upon whom the king has previously relied that the king asks for 'a sign,' for tangible evidence that the oracle of hope is reliable."⁵ An argument could be made that Hezekiah asks for a sign because he is skeptical or hesitant about his healing, but at the very least, through this dialogue the king emerges as a more complex character in the story, and this level of complexity will increase as the rest of the chapter unfolds. Third, Isaiah does not deliver any rebuke when the king requests a sign; he simply declares that the shadow descending into darkness will instead turn back. An analogy can be made between Hezekiah and the shadow – as both are descending into darkness – and the city of Jerusalem, which likewise was enveloped in the gloom of Assyria's shadow before a last-second reprieve announced by Isaiah.⁶ This scenario of Hezekiah's fate and Isaiah's word ought to be kept in mind for the next installment of the story: here, the prophetic sign operates as a gracious condescension, and yet the relationship between king and prophet is decidedly more strained during their encounter in 2 Kings 20.

4 Cf. Gina Hens-Piazza, *1-2 Kings* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006), 371: "God's election of the house of David propels the rescue of Hezekiah from death."

5 Walter Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings* (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2000), 523. Note also Iain W. Provan, *1 and 2 Kings* (NIBC 7; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 264: "the king appears unwilling to believe that temporary remission will indeed lead to complete recovery; he asks for a further sign."

6 Choon Leong Seow, "The First and Second Books of Kings: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 3 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1999), 271: "It is important to note here that reprieve and recovery for the king are linked to the same good fortune for Judah (v. 6b). The fate of the king and the fate of the city are bound together. God will deliver both the king and Judah from the hands of the Assyrian king for God's own sake, as well as for the sake of David. Read in its larger literary-theological context, the deliverance of Jerusalem can be understood as being partly God's specific response to Sennacherib's blasphemous challenge and partly the manifestation of God's grace extended to David."

The Visitors

During the Assyrian crisis, the reader discovers in retrospect, Hezekiah was also plagued by illness. But illness is not Hezekiah's only other problem, although the next episode in 2 Kings 20:12-13 on the surface seems less severe than a deadly malady. Quietly and without much fanfare, a delegation bearing letters and a gift from the king of Babylon arrive in Jerusalem, congratulating Hezekiah on his recent recovery. Several important questions surround this delegation, such as: why have they come to the land of Judah, when do they arrive, and why is Hezekiah apparently eager to give them an extensive tour of his treasures? In terms of historical background, a number of commentators suggest that the Babylonian embassy use Hezekiah's recovery as a mere pretext for a visit that has other purposes: "The occasion for Merodach Baladan's embassy to Hezekiah is not concern for the ill monarch. Rather, it is based in the alliance between Hezekiah and Merodach Baladan and their plans to revolt jointly against the Assyrian Empire following the battlefield death of Sargon II in 705 BCE and the succession to the throne by Sennacherib. Hezekiah's willingness to show Merodach Baladan's ambassadors all of his wealth indicates preparation for alliance and revolt."⁷ Perhaps there is an analogy with the visit of the Queen of Sheba in the days of Solomon (1 Kings 10:1-10), who came to test the king with hard questions and brought a caravan of gifts.⁸ Alternatively, a closer analogue in the Deuteronomistic History might be David's embassy to Hanun after the death of Nahash king of the Ammonites (2 Sam 10:1-4).⁹ In that episode – ostensibly a gesture of condolence – there are suspicions of reconnaissance and nefarious behavior; regardless of David's motives or the accusations of the Ammonite officials, the entire affair ends badly and becomes a preface to war. It is not unprecedented, so one might argue, for diplomatic protocols to be used as a cover for a more furtive agenda.

7 Marvin A. Sweeney, *I & II Kings* (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 423-424. Cf. Brueggemann, *I & 2 Kings*, 524: "The appearance of Babylon in the narrative suggests anti-Assyrian intrigue, for Babylon was a stifled province of Assyria that ached for its autonomy. Perhaps the visit was an attempt to provoke Hezekiah into active rebellion against Assyria, surely a high-risk venture."

8 Richard D. Nelson, *First and Second Kings* (Interpretation; Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987), 245: "Although modern commentators have speculated on various political reasons for this visit, Kings represents it as a simple courtesy call and shows no interest in the international implications. The story functions as an analogue to Solomon's reception of the Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:1-10), but Hezekiah's hospitality represents folly instead of wisdom."

9 Note the helpful discussions of both the Queen of Sheba's visit and David's Ammonite delegation in Bostock, *A Portrayal of Trust*, 124-25.

If there is a reasonable possibility that the Babylonian delegation is using the king of Judah's recovery as a pretext, what about Hezekiah himself? Is he deceived? Does he genuinely believe that the Babylonians are merely wishing him well, or is he rather more guileful and understands that a different game is being played here? According to the MT, when the Babylonians present their letters and gifts, Hezekiah "listened" (שמע) to them (v. 13). Many English translations opt for "rejoice" or "welcome" following Isa 39:2 (שמח) and the LXX, but if the MT is retained, then there must be unrecorded words that accompany the diplomats; as Hezekiah heeds these words, it lends a more covert air to the proceedings. Furthermore, giving an extensive tour of his treasuries can be interpreted as Hezekiah's consent to an alliance: "Hezekiah may well be demonstrating that he is in a position to be an equal ally with Babylon, or even that he has the economic means to strike a bargain. Babylon just might be the means finally to be rid of the persistent Assyrian menace that is hovering over Jerusalem."¹⁰ Of course, Hezekiah's motives are not clearly stated, and this is just one of several intriguing gaps or ambiguities in the narrative that scholars have attempted to resolve.¹¹ Along the same lines, the timing of the Babylonian delegation also needs to be questioned, and on this issue it is not surprising that there is no consensus among scholars. For instance, in his study of the parallel story in Isaiah 39 Joseph Blenkinsopp states that the Babylonian visit can be assumed to occur after the Assyrian crisis has been lifted: "we are told explicitly that it was occasioned by news of the king's sickness and recovery and therefore is represented as taking place after the Assyrian army had broken off the blockade of the city and retired."¹² Such a position accords with Hezekiah as a model of piety, as though his worst days are now behind him. By contrast, after comparing 20:1 and 20:6, Burke Long interprets "at that time" in v. 12a to imply that the Assyrian threat has *not* been lifted, with a more unsettling repercussion: "While Jerusalem was under siege," writes Long, "and thus while he was seeking Yahweh's aid (see 19:19), Hezekiah sought to protect Jerusalem by agreeing to an alliance with Babylon."¹³ The arrival of Babylon,

¹⁰ Hens-Piazza, *1-2 Kings*, 372.

¹¹ For a relevant discussion of literary gaps and ambiguities in biblical narrative, see Phillip Michael Sherman, *Babel's Tower Translated: Genesis 11 and Ancient Jewish Interpretation* (BIS 117; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 18-22.

¹² Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Hezekiah and the Babylonian Delegation: A Critical Reading of Isaiah 39:1-8," *Essays on Ancient Israel in Its Near Eastern Context: A Tribute to Nadav Na'aman*, eds. Yairah Amit, Ehud Ben Zvi, Israel Finkelstein, and Oded Lipschits (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 107-22 (110).

¹³ Burke O. Long, *2 Kings* (FOTL 10; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 244. Note also the conclusions of Robb Andrew Young, *Hezekiah in History and Tradition* (VTSup 155; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 68-70.

therefore, presents a new temptation or opportunity even as it results in a more conflicted character, for the same king who entreats the prophet from the temple also welcomes a potential alliance that might promise a military solution rather than a miraculous one. As the episode continues, there is a strongly-worded voice of opposition that Hezekiah must also consider.

The Interview

As the Babylonian delegation is receiving a tour of Hezekiah's kingdom, it is quite plausible that the reader is witnessing the ferment of rebellion: "The story gives a glimpse into the widespread diplomacy of the rebel movement."¹⁴ Through this episode, therefore, it could be that Hezekiah's trust in God is put to the test, and just as the illness tested him physically, so this approach by the Babylonians tests his spiritual resolve. On the one hand, we have noted that Hezekiah is acclaimed for his trust (2 Kings 18:5) and his earlier actions in the narrative certainly warrant such a commendation. On the other hand, Seow wonders to what extent the Babylonian visit complicates matters and indicates that Hezekiah's trust is less in God and more in a political alliance: "Hezekiah's trust in God does not seem so firm after all. He, who has been portrayed as a model of faith and piety, turns to the Babylonians, for reasons that the narrator does not bother to explain."¹⁵ What the narrator is reticent to explain, so we will see in what follows, the prophet Isaiah is keen to elucidate.

Prophets who pose uncomfortable questions to reigning monarchs are not unheard of in the book of Kings. To cite an example, in 1 Kings 1:23-27 there is a fraught scene when Nathan arrives in David's bedchamber to inquire about Adonijah's apparent coronation party. After acquainting the king with the circumstances, and implying that if Adonijah has been acting without royal permission it surely amounts to treason, Nathan then mildly asks David: "Is this something my lord the king has done without letting his servants know who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him?" (NIV) Since Nathan had just coached Bathsheba to likewise make inquiries of the king, he clearly is planting a seed in David's mind. Prophets, one might surmise, ask questions of kings in order to get them to do or say something. When Nathan arrives in the king's presence, he knows more than he lets on and has a prophetic agenda, and both of these aspects are also present when Isaiah approaches Hezekiah in

14 J.A. Montgomery and H.S. Gehman, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Kings* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1951), 509.

15 Seow, "The First and Second Books of Kings," 274.

2 Kings 20:14, "Then Isaiah the prophet came to King Hezekiah, and said to him, 'What did these men say? From where did they come to you?'" It is unclear whether the visitors have departed or are waiting nearby, but it sounds like the tour is complete and any negotiations have been concluded.¹⁶ There is every reason to believe that Isaiah already knows the answers to these questions, and therefore his interview with the king probably begins with an opportunity for Hezekiah to be honest: perhaps he has been deceived by the Babylonians or entered precipitously into a political pact. Either way, there is a chance to open a dialogue with the prophet, but Hezekiah is immediately evasive in his reply: "From a far country. They came from Babylon." It might be a sense of embarrassment or a tacit admission of guilt, but Hezekiah's laconic answer provides his interlocutor with only minimal information. Altogether, the combination of unclear motives, disingenuous conduct and evasive language suggest that in this episode the Babylonian delegation and Hezekiah are configured as mirror images of each other, a fitting representation if indeed they have now formed an alliance against Assyria. The king concedes the provenance of his guests, but never answers the question of what was said, although Isaiah essentially fills in the blank during his long oracle in riposte.

Equivocal answers to prophetic questions rarely meet with success. Gehazi once attempted to evade Elisha's question in 2 Kings 5:25-27, and was rewarded with an announcement about a grim future for his descendants. To his credit, Hezekiah does speak plainly when Isaiah inquires about what the visitors saw during their tour: the Babylonians see everything, just as Hezekiah now tells Isaiah everything. And yet the prophet's subsequent rejoinder in vv. 16-18 is about as bleak as Elisha's oracle about Gehazi's descendants. To be sure, Isaiah interprets the Babylonian tour of the treasures as a harbinger of desolate days to come, as the Babylonians will return at some point *without* any gifts or congratulations for recovery from illness: "What Hezekiah's Babylonian visitors *saw*, Isaiah tells the king, they will one day *take away* to the distant land from which they have come."¹⁷ The king's palace itself will be as empty as the treasury, for the royal sons also will be taken to Babylon where they will be greeted with castration (if one interprets "eunuchs" [סְרִיסִים] in the conventional sense). In this interview Isaiah has the deportment of an international spokesperson who is not inclined to favoritism, well aware that the understated entrance of Babylon into Jerusalem carries long-term significance. After hearing Isaiah's oracle, moreover, there is an irony as painful as Hezekiah's boil, for

16 Bostock, *A Portrayal of Trust*, 121: "the envoys are either not present or have already left for Babylon. The ellipsis regarding the Babylonians is left for the reader to fill in."

17 Provan, 1 and 2 Kings, 265.

even as the Assyrians will not enter the city, the more dangerous Babylonians are welcomed into Jerusalem with Hezekiah's largesse and a royal tour. For Roger Tones, the arrival of the Babylonian delegation and their dubious motives serve to foreshadow later events in Jerusalem's story: "Judah's downfall will come, not at the hands of Assyria, which has seemed so threatening in Hezekiah's time, but at those of Babylon, which at the moment seems so friendly (20:12) and far away (v. 14)."¹⁸ Hezekiah is under the impression that Assyria is the problem and perhaps an alliance is the answer, but Isaiah's oracle underscores a more foreboding reality.

The Response

King Saul was once told that his daughter Michal loved David, and the NRSV translates his reaction in 1 Sam 18:21 as follows: "Saul thought (וַיֹּאמֶר), 'Let me give her to him that she may be a snare for him and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him.' Therefore Saul said (וַיֹּאמֶר) to David a second time, 'You shall now be my son-in-law.'" The NSRV interprets two discrete utterances from Saul here: the first is an internal word about his brooding intentions, and the second is a public statement of disingenuous affability. Because Saul has kept a jealous eye on David since the Goliath encounter and fears the worst, it would make sense that he has this bifurcated response to the news about Michal, and now on account of his interior monologue the reader is aware that he sees this an opportunity to destroy David. Unfortunately for Saul, he miscalculates with his foreskin-dowry plan and David actually thrives, and the desire Saul expresses in his soliloquy does not come to pass.¹⁹ In 2 Kings 20:17-18 Hezekiah has been grimly informed that along with the treasures his sons will be taken away to Babylon, and there will become eunuchs in the service of the foreign king. How does Hezekiah respond to Isaiah's forecast in v. 19? The NSRV rendering, as quoted in the introduction to this essay, again understands וַיֹּאמֶר in two different ways: Hezekiah's first utterance is a response to Isaiah ("The word of the LORD that you have spoken is good"), but the second is a private aside ("Why not, if there will be peace and security in my

18 Roger Tones, "1 & 2 Kings," in *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, eds. J.D.G. Dunn and J.W. Rogerson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 276-77.

19 On the larger narrative structure, see Bruce C. Birch, "The First and Second Books of Samuel," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 1122: "Ironically, David adopts a similar strategy of removing a man by sending him into battle when he sends Uriah to his death in 2 Samuel 11."

days?"). Similar to Saul, Hezekiah's public words to Isaiah differ from his private soliloquy. Surveying a number of secondary sources, Bostock sketches the two basic interpretive trajectories that scholars have proposed: "The words of Hezekiah may be a cynical response to the prophetic oracle. The king is being selfish, thankful that the problems with the Babylonians will come after his reign. He can understand the word of YHWH as good, because such troubles will not affect him, only his descendants. The alternative is to view Hezekiah as a pious king who willingly accepts the oracle, grateful to God for at least delaying any judgment."²⁰ After a thoughtful analysis of these two positions, Bostock opts for an interpretation of Hezekiah's response that is consistent with the king's initial portrayal of trust and piety at the outset of his reign: "It is perfectly reasonable to view Hezekiah's statements in 20:19 as expressions of trust in God and of gratitude for the peace and security during his reign, knowing that the God who has delayed judgement once is ready, willing, and able to do the same, if his people and especially his rulers will respond in a proper way towards YHWH."²¹ Overall, he presents an optimistic and enthusiastic interpretation, but several questions remain unanswered. It is difficult to square Isaiah's evident disappointment with Hezekiah – conveyed through a pointed interrogation – with the king's reply about peace in his time. Furthermore, one wonders why the narrative provides a repetition of וַיֹּאמֶר if not to reveal a double-mindedness on Hezekiah's part. There is also an apparent incongruity: how could he sound relieved after an oracle that is so unfavorable for his descendants?

The alternative position, whereby Hezekiah's private thoughts reveal a more self-centered perspective and one that is harder to reconcile with his earlier portrait of a zealous reformer, is forwarded by Suzie Park. In Park's analysis, "the argument that Hezekiah is portrayed positively in the story of the envoys flattens the story and explains away difficult exegetical problems. At best, Hezekiah is pictured neutrally. He mindlessly and inadvertently does something that, unbeknownst to him, causes a later national calamity. However," Park concludes, "even if one grants that Hezekiah is a victim of fate, his reply to Isaiah's prophecy makes him look less than ideal (2 Kgs. 20:19//Isa. 39:8). Read

²⁰ Bostock, *A Portrayal of Trust*, 135.

²¹ Bostock, *A Portrayal of Trust*, 144. He further compares the situation of Josiah, "when a similar delay and parallel royal exemption from divine judgement was predicted. Huldah the prophetess prophesies judgement on Jerusalem and its inhabitants because they have turned from YHWH to worship other gods. However, the king of Judah is spared because he was humble and penitent. Josiah is told, 'You shall be gathered to your grave in peace, and your eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring on this place' (2 Kgs. 22:20)."

in a negative light, he appears callously to shrug off the coming catastrophe by narrow-mindedly focusing on his own days, which luckily for him will be full of peace and security."²² Once again, the timing needs to be considered. If Hezekiah asks the rhetorical question "will there not be peace (הֲלוֹא אִם-שְׁלוֹם)" and security in my lifetime?" *after* the deliverance, then the likelihood of smugness increases. But if he speaks these words *prior* to the deliverance, then they are doubly ironic: not only does he have the assault of Assyria to soon deal with, but he also is faced with the prospects of another opponent in the long term *with whom he fancied an alliance*. In a stroke Hezekiah becomes a much more complex character, even as Isaiah the prophet emerges from this interview as a confronter of kings: the monarchs of both Judah and Assyria receive negative oracles from this prophetic voice. Indeed, both kings receive a prophetic word at the height of their confidence, as it were, and so have more in common than may have been suspected at the outset of Hezekiah's career.

The Obituary

Hezekiah was commanded to put his house in order when Isaiah announced his imminent death in 2 Kings 20:1. Rather than acquiescing, however, Hezekiah responded by turning his face to the wall and uttering a fairly long prayer: along with bitter tears, he beseeches God to remember his integrity and the manner of his life. Rarely is a prayer answered as quickly in the Deuteronomistic History, and Isaiah is only able to travel a short distance through the middle court before God turns him around and the prophet returns with an assurance that the king will go up to the temple on the third day. It is striking, therefore, that when Isaiah unfolds an oracle about the Babylonian tempest that one day will carry away treasures and sons, Hezekiah has a quite different reaction. There is no hint of weeping, no turning his face to the wall, and no request for

22 Song-Mi Suzie Park, *Hezekiah and the Dialogue of Memory* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 104. Cf. Seow, "The First and Second Books of Kings," 274: "Hezekiah was more concerned, it seems, with his lame-duck reign than with the long-term consequences of his misplaced trust in the Babylonians. Interpreters from time immemorial have been uncomfortable with this negative portrayal of Hezekiah at the end of the mostly positive assessment of his reign. One must not try to exonerate Hezekiah for the sake of literary coherence, however." On the structural effect of this episode as Hezekiah's last word, see Lissa Wray Beal, *1 & 2 Kings* (AOTC; Downers Grove: IVP, 2014), 483: "By placing this narrative as the last in Hezekiah's account, his portrait ends in a less complementary way than it began. Juxtaposed to positive accounts of the king, it prepares for the final chapters of Kings."

any sign. The prophet was vague about the timeframe of Babylon's return, but Hezekiah does not seek clarification, perhaps secure in his own fifteen-year life extension. The shadow of judgement will not be turned back this time, but given his successful track record, could Hezekiah at least have made an attempt? As it turns out, his bifurcated response to Isaiah in v. 19 are Hezekiah's last words, and so the image of ambivalence lingers even as the narrative transitions to the notice of the king's burial and the accession of his son Manasseh. The centerpiece of his obituary is the "conduit" (תעלה) to bring water into the city – memorialized as "Hezekiah's Tunnel" – a work of engineering that is often praised and admired for its energy and ingenuity.²³ And yet, when the report about the tunnel is heard in the wake of Isaiah's oracle it also brings a concluding irony to Hezekiah's tenure. This water supply will be desperately needed when the Babylonians, first introduced to the city by Hezekiah himself, return for a lengthy siege before taking what remains of the king's treasury. Within a few eventful chapters, then, Hezekiah's *sons* will delay their sterility by drinking from this water conduit, before the wall is pierced and they are marched into exile in accordance with Isaiah's forecast.

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23 E.g., Mary Katherine Yem Hing Hom, "Where Art Thou, O Hezekiah's Tunnel: A Biblical Scholar Considers the Archaeological and Biblical Evidence concerning the Waterworks in 2 Chronicles 32:3-4, 30 and 2 Kings 20:20," *JBL* 135 (2016): 493-503.

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Isaiah 1-12: Presentation of a (Davidic?) Politics

Ian D. Wilson

Perhaps obvious, the inspiration for this essay's title – and the point of departure for my thinking about the book of Isaiah on this particular occasion – is Peter Ackroyd's now classic work "Isaiah I–XII: Presentation of a Prophet."¹ Ackroyd, beginning his study with a brief overview of the many problems related to the book's composition, proceeds to ask: "Why is there so substantial a book associated with the prophet Isaiah?"² His answer is multifaceted. First, he argues, Isaiah was remembered as a crucial player in Jerusalem's survival before Assyria and, related, as a trustworthy predictor of the city's downfall before Babylon (Isa 36-39; cf. 2 Kgs 18-20), which placed him in a particularly prominent position in Judean memory. Second, drawing on the early work of Robert Carroll on cognitive dissonance and prophetic literature,³ Ackroyd emphasizes the import of Yahweh's paradoxical and deconstructive mission for the prophet, as stated in Isaiah 6:9-13. Why have promises of salvation not come to pass? Because the prophet's task in the first place was to preach such that he was not understood. This kind of message would enable extensive rereading and reinterpretation of prophetic texts, resulting eventually in a book like Isaiah. Third, and most important, Ackroyd shows in detail how chs. 1-12 – a unit that is clearly demarcated in the book – present the prophet as an "authoritative spokesman."⁴ These chapters strategically emphasize the past fall *and* future rise of Jerusalem and its human leadership, doing so with a

¹ See pp. 16–48 in *Congress Volume: Göttingen, 1977*, VTSup 29 (Leiden: Brill, 1978). I presented a version of the present work at the "Politics in the Hebrew Bible's Prophetic Literature" seminar, at the 2016 CSBS Annual Meeting, University of Calgary. At the seminar, Mark Boda presented an official response to the essay; many thanks to Mark for his insightful and constructive critique. At the seminar, too, Francis Landy was in attendance and, as usual, offered incisive feedback. I have met no other person whose readings of Isaiah's visions are as visionary as Francis's, and I am honored to dedicate this essay to him as he enters his eighth decade of life.

² Ackroyd, "Isaiah I–XII," 21.

³ The ultimate outgrowth of this work was Carroll's *When Prophecy Failed: Cognitive Dissonance in the Prophetic Traditions of the Old Testament* (New York: Seabury, 1979). See esp. pp. 130-56 for Carroll's thoughts on Isaiah.

⁴ Ackroyd, "Isaiah I–XII," 34.

certain “historical attachment”⁵ that links the figure of Isaiah with a succession of Davidic rulers in Jerusalem and with the imperial endeavors of Assyria, but also with a kind of ahistorical imagination of things to come. The unit concludes finally with the psalm in ch. 12, which lends legitimacy to this presentation of the prophet and his activities vis-à-vis Jerusalem, its political past and future.

Ackroyd’s argument is, thus, all about history and politics, about the complex processes of remembering and imagining Judah’s power and its power relations vis-à-vis its neighbors, its imperial overlords, and its deity Yahweh; and about how a particular prophet of old was remembered as speaking to and envisioning these issues. Although my own essay here is not interested in Ackroyd’s main question per se, it is interested in the implications of his answers. If Isaiah 1-12 presents an authoritative prophet as a figure to be associated with the book, as a kind of character meant to inform readings of the text, how then might the historiographical and political themes presented alongside this figure also inform such readings, in the book’s ancient Judean milieu?

In what follows I will sketch an outline of how the book of Isaiah presents its politics, working from the assumption – based on the research of Ackroyd and others – that the presentation of Isaiah, the prophet, in the book’s opening chapters is key. I will end up arguing that the book advocates for Davidic politics, as others have claimed, but that its discourse does not settle on any one single Davidic hope or disappointment for the community going forward. Riffing on anthropologist Maurice Bloch, I would say that, for Isaianic discourse, David is central but is nothing special.⁶ This argument, too, has more general implications for how we understand prophetic books as literary artifacts from ancient Judah and also for how we understand the lived experience of Judean society in the early Second Temple era, a people whose lives had been subject to various forms of imperial rule for several centuries.

I

I begin with a few brief comments on method. I take what Jacob Stromberg calls a “descriptive/discourse-oriented” approach to the book of Isaiah.⁷ This

5 Ackroyd, “Isaiah 1-XII,” 41.

6 See Bloch’s essay “Why religion is nothing special but is central,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B* 363 (2008), 2055-61.

7 See Stromberg’s *An Introduction to the Study of Isaiah*, T&T Clark Approaches to Biblical Studies (London: T&T Clark International, 2011). The term “discourse-oriented” he takes up from Meir Sternberg.

does not mean, however, that I am *not* interested in history, or that my description of the book's discourse is *not* critical and historicist in orientation. To the contrary, I am deeply interested in the historical community responsible for this text and its discourse, the sociocultural setting in which the book emerged as such, and in which it was initially read and received.

There is no doubt that the book of Isaiah is a literary text, which demonstrates both awareness of itself and a sense of unity, and that it was read as such in antiquity.⁸ Sirach 48:23–25, for example, contains references to both Isa 2:1 and 61:2–3, implying that, by the second century BCE at the latest, the book was read as a unified discourse attributed to a prophet named Isaiah from long ago.⁹ And there is good reason for us to push the emergence of that unified discourse back a couple centuries, into the early Second Temple period.¹⁰ The ancient Judean book of Isaiah, then, as we are more or less able to know it from textual witnesses such as the MT, the LXX, and the Qumran scrolls, is a source for our knowledge of this period.¹¹ And holistic, discourse-oriented approaches to this source can make significant contributions to our understandings of the community in which and for which the book emerged.¹²

8 Cf. Isa 1:27–31, which has much in common with material found in chs. 56–66, suggesting that the book's opening passage and its closing passages were shaped and read with each other in mind. Another example is the interrelationship between 11:6–9 and 65:25. See Stromberg, *Study of Isaiah*, 51–53 and 67–72, for discussion of these references, and also 77–93, for his discussion of a “holistic approach” to Isaiah, the book.

9 Cf. Shalom Paul, *Isaiah 40–66: A Commentary*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 1; also Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, AB 19 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 84.

10 Note 2 Chr 32:32, and see, e.g., comments in Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 84–85. Marvin Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39, with an Introduction to Prophetic Literature*, FOTL 16 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 51–55, argues for a similar time frame for the book's “final form” but does so by linking the text with Ezra–Nehemiah traditions. In any case, there is good reason to date the book of Isaiah and its discourse to this era.

11 On the difference between a “book” and various instantiations of it, see Ronald Hendel, “What Is a Biblical Book?” in *From Author to Copyist: Essays on the Composition, Redaction, and Transmission of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of Zipi Talshir*, ed. Cana Werman (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 283–302.

12 Cf. Ehud Ben Zvi, “The Yehudite Collection of Prophetic Books and Imperial Contexts: Some Observations,” in *Divination, Politics, and Ancient Near Eastern Empires*, ed. Alan Lenzi and Jonathan Stökl, ANEM 7 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), 145–69 (online: <https://www.sbl-site.org/publications/Books_ANEMonographs.aspx>), who argues that, when linguists study grammar for example, they focus not only on new developments in vocabulary and syntax, but on how these developments fit into and work within existing linguistic structures (146–47). Thus, to investigate the sociopolitical interests of the literate

II

Following Ackroyd, scholarship on Isaiah has generally acknowledged the key import of the book's "presentation" of its prophet, especially in chapters 1-12. His essay has been rather influential. The question here is: How does the book present its politics along the same lines?

Here I would like to build upon and interact with the recent work of Jacob Stromberg, mentioned above, who has a keen interest in the political themes developed via the book's discourse, and whose work follows Ackroyd at a number of key points.¹³ Stromberg argues that in chs. 7 and 8 in particular, a leitmotif develops based on several key terms that one may trace throughout book. He sums up this leitmotif as follows: "[T]he 'plans' [עצה/עוין] of foreign nations will 'not stand' [קום] and are destined to be 'frustrated' [פרר] when they come up against the divine plan tied to the house of David."¹⁴ Having established the development of this leitmotif, he argues for a holistic reading of the book that would result from it. According to Stromberg, Ahaz (in ch. 7) and Hezekiah (in chs. 36-39) are narrative analogues. Each king faces a significant and imminent foreign threat. In the face of the threat, Ahaz fails in his faith while Hezekiah demonstrates piety. In the end, however, each receives a promise of *future* crisis, despite their disparate reactions to the immediate threat. So, in light of these two analogous but contradictory Davidic exemplars, what is to become of the Davidic line? The narrative structure of chs. 1-39, Stromberg argues, would push readers into chs. 40-66 with anticipation for answers. To find potential answers, he traces and examines the interconnected instances of the word "sign" throughout the book (e.g., 7:10; 37:30; 38:7; 55:13; 66:19), concluding that these signs collectively indicate an awaited return from exile and a restoration of temple worship in Zion/Jerusalem, at least for the pious remnant. This indication, he says, echoes the Davidic covenant of 2 Samuel 7 and alludes, especially in chs. 65-66, to the royal oracles earlier in the book (e.g., 11:1-9). In other words, according to Stromberg's analysis, the book strategically reaffirms the ongoing import and awaited return of Davidic kingship for Israel's faithful.¹⁵

community in early Second Temple Judah vis-à-vis the book of Isaiah, we should study not only the so-called Trita-Isaiah, for example, but should study the book as a whole, as it likely existed, was read, and contributed to discourse(s) in that period.

13 He also draws on seminal studies by Willem Beuken, Hugh Williamson, and others.

14 Cf. the wording of Isaiah 8:9-10; 14:24-27; 19:11-17; and 23:8-9. See Stromberg, *Study of Isaiah*, 84-93 (quote from 87).

15 See Stromberg, *Study of Isaiah*, 114-27.

Now, in that short paragraph I have not done justice to the complexity and nuance of Stromberg's reading, which is perceptive of the complex details in the text, to be sure. Nonetheless, suffice it to say for the time being that I find this interpretation a little too narrow and focused, perhaps too monolithic, for such a sprawling and multivocal text as Isaiah. The problem is, in the book: What precisely is the "divine plan tied to the house of David"? How does the book of Isaiah conceive of Davidic kingship? While I agree that a reaffirmation of the Davidic promise, and even a hopeful longing for another Davidic king, is a strong voice in the book, it is not the only one, nor is it even the only voice speaking to the future of the Davidic line. Below I will outline some of the various discursive statements in the book that complicate any singular focus on the awaited return of an actual human (or superhuman) Davidic monarchy. But in short, while I agree that Davidic kingship is central to the book's discourse, I submit that the book hedges on its understanding of what Davidic kingship could and should be going forward, thus reflecting a kind of hedging with regard to Davidic kingship within the early Second Temple community in general. Thinking about another work of ancient Judean literature, the book of Samuel, David Jobling once wrote that the literature fails to control its subject matter, and that the contradictions in the texts reflect "*contradictions in the mindset that receives them*."¹⁶ I think the same about the book of Isaiah, and I think the hedging is evident in the book's presentation of its prophet and thus its prophetic politics, in its opening chapters.

III

As Ackroyd argued long ago, it was the presentation of an authoritative, yet richly ambiguous, prophet in chs. 1-12 that probably enabled the formation of such a vast and variegated collection of prophetic texts into a unified discourse that we now call the *book* of Isaiah. And as Stromberg argues in detail, chs. 1 and 6 – which are intertextually linked with chs. 65–66 – provide a framework that may function as a "literary lens through which to view the other oracles in the book."¹⁷ At this point, I would like to focus mainly on chapter 6. Via its presentation of the prophet's call, it makes "blindsight" necessary for any insight into the book, deafness key for any real hearing of its messages.¹⁸ As the proph-

¹⁶ David Jobling, *1 Samuel*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1998), 19.

¹⁷ Stromberg, *Study of Isaiah*, 107.

¹⁸ Cf. Robert Carroll, "Blindsight and the Vision Thing: Blindness and Insight in the Book of Isaiah," in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah: Studies of an Interpretive Tradition*, ed.

et's call to prophesy, too, it has a marked narrational import: it is a scene standing at the beginning of the prophet's career, a scene that shapes that career's trajectory as represented in a prophetic book with a rough chronological ordering.¹⁹ The paradox of blindsight, then, would inform understandings of the book's politics, and the book's politics would in turn reinforce the paradox of the prophet's mission, as represented in the book.

Thinking on this presentation of the prophet's call in ch. 6, Francis Landy focuses on the relationship between the prophet and his messages, the "potential opposition between the prophet and what he sees, the prophet as a site of resistance to the prophecy."²⁰ Chapter 6, Landy states, is "a metaprophetic key to the book," a literary instance at which the "I" of Isaiah, the humanity of the prophet as represented in the text, comes together with the "Eye" of Isaiah, the visionary aspect of the book as prophetic literature. The passage introduces readers to the literary figure of Isaiah and his task, and it gives insight into how to read the text itself.²¹ Landy goes on to argue that the book as a whole, like the call passage in ch. 6, is characterized by divine and thus prophetic ambivalence. Its reading is informed by diptychs of hope and doom.²² The problem of Isaiah, the prophet and the book,

is a problem of translation. Isaiah has to translate the language of the future age in terms of this one, while letting the audience know that their mother tongue is now strange, that the conditions of their world have shifted. It is a translation back from the language of the future to the

C.C. Broyles and C.A. Evans, *vtsup* 70 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 79-93; also Francis Landy, "I and Eye in Isaiah, or Gazing at the Invisible," *JBL* 131 (2012): 85-97. A comparable theme in the book is that of the interrelationship between remembering and forgetting. See, e.g., ch. 43, which brings to mind the exodus and Song of the Sea as a way of envisioning the future, but also commands the people to forget the former things, *not* to remember the things of old. Cf. Ian D. Wilson, "The Song of the Sea and Isaiah: Exodus 15 in Post-monarchic Prophetic Discourse," in *Thinking of Water in the Early Second Temple Period*, ed. E. Ben Zvi and C. Levin, *BZAW* 461 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 123-48 (139-42); also idem, "Yahweh's Consciousness: Isaiah 40-48 and Ancient Judean Historical Thought," *VT* 66 (2016), 646-61.

19 Stromberg, *Study of Isaiah*, 109-10, citing a number of earlier studies, shows that there are allusions to ch. 6 throughout the book, and argues that the scene in ch. 6 would guide reading and remembering of the prophet and his work as a whole.

20 Landy, "I and Eye," 85.

21 Landy, "I and Eye," 87. For a survey of various interpretations of the classic double bind in Isaiah 6, that the people should hear but not understand and that they should see but not perceive, see pp. 87-90.

22 Landy, "I and Eye," 92, citing the work of Willem Beuken.

present, but also an anticipation of the language of the future in the present....

The problem of politics in the book of Isaiah is likewise one of translation. How would one read the language of intersection between past and future, somehow at once grasping and mastering the shifting conditions of power in the world?

This problem of translation plays out in brief historiographically minded passages – in ch. 7 for example – and thus in the book's presentation of the prophet's own life and time in Judah's past. King Ahaz, repeatedly noted as a descendant of David (7:2, 13; cf. 7:17), is anxious with news of immediate threat. But Isaiah speaks of political happenings well beyond the present moment: the shattering of Ephraim as a people, some sixty-five years hence (7:8); and Assyria's eventual total dominance of the Levant (7:17-20). In the face of imminent international danger, the prophet tells the king simply to sit tight, to do nothing and wait, which political theorist Michael Walzer calls "the prophetic idea of a religiously sanctioned foreign policy."²³ Isaiah's political engagement is one of disengagement. The prophet and the king inhabit different social and political spheres and therefore speak different languages. They are seemingly unable to communicate at this juncture. "Sit tight, do nothing" are words that Ahaz does not know how to hear, and "make international alliances" are words that Isaiah does not know how to (i.e., cannot) utter. It is only with the "sign" of 7:14 – the עִלְמָה pregnant with a child to be called Immanuel – which brings the message into Ahaz's physical here and now, that the communicative gap between prophet and monarch is somewhat bridged. The king receives a prophetic sign, but the sign is "enigmatic; we do not know what will become of the child, or whether he will choose good or evil. But that very openness of choice suggests something beyond the deterministic antimonies of ch. 6, as well as the sterile contention of king and prophet."²⁴

In addition, as mentioned above, Stromberg and others have argued that, within the structure of the book, Ahaz and Hezekiah – both called out and marked as Davidic descendants (7:2, 13; 37:35; 38:5) – function as analogues to one another. Hezekiah demonstrates piety in the face of Rabshakeh's threats and receives a prophetic message of immediate protection (cf. ch. 37), but the prophet nonetheless speaks of coming judgment too, of a distant future that seems unfathomable to the Davidic king, of a time when *Babylon* would cap-

23 Michael Walzer, *In God's Shadow: Politics in the Hebrew Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 100.

24 Landy, "I and Eye," 95.

ture Jerusalem and the king's own sons would be taken away (39:5-8).²⁵ Hezekiah, focused on his own situation and lifetime, appears not to recognize the real, long term impact of Isaiah's vision for the future. In response to Isaiah's message of impending doom, the king replies, "Good is Yahweh's word, which you have spoken ... for there will be peace and security in my days" (39:8).²⁶ The problem of prophetic translation is thus firmly established.

The translation problem plays out, too, in the book's presentation of ongoing sociopolitical negotiations in present and future horizons. It therefore had import in the actual lives of the book's postmonarchic readers, who would see themselves as translators of this divine knowledge from long ago, as ones contemplating and anticipating the shifting conditions of their own world, via the represented personage and visions of Isaiah the prophet.

If, as described above, Stromberg and others are at least partly correct in arguing that the opening chapters of Isaiah develop a political leitmotif centered upon Yahweh's plans for Davidic kingship, then where would this particular motif lead the book's readers? Time and space do not permit a full discussion of these issues, but I would like at least to sketch some potential answers, keeping in mind Landy's observation that the tension between prophetic persona and prophetic vision, rooted in the prophetic double-bind of ch. 6, is "germinal to the poetics of the book of Isaiah."²⁷ First, to be clear, Stromberg offers one potential reading, and it is compelling in a number of its particulars.²⁸ There is little question that the latter chapters of the book point toward an awaited reestablishment of proper temple worship in Jerusalem. In Judean discourse, any mention of the temple carries with it possible interconnections with Davidic kingship and the divine promises to that dynasty, as prominently recounted in the books of Samuel and Chronicles. So, there are at least thematic links between Isaiah's visions of future restoration and Davidic rule. And in any case, as Stromberg details, 65:25 refers back directly to the

25 Although Isa 37 presents a pious Hezekiah who trusts in his deity, other passages in Isaiah perhaps emphasize Hezekiah's *lack* of trust in Yahweh: e.g., Judah's turning to Egypt for assistance (30:1-7; 31:1; cf. 36:6, 9), activity that commentators often link with Hezekiah. Scholars have long debated the connections between Isa 36-39 and 28-33, and between Isa 36-39 and 2 Kgs 18-20, and how these texts variously represent the figure of Hezekiah as Judah's king, for better or worse. See Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, 458-61, for a good overview of the issues involved.

26 Of course, as Francis Landy has asked me, what if he does recognize the full extent of Isaiah's vision? How are we to read Hezekiah's response here? Dumbfounded-ness? Pious resignation? Cynicism? The state of mind behind the king's words is an open question.

27 Landy, "I and Eye," 97.

28 See Stromberg, *Study of Isaiah*, 113-127.

oracle of 11:1-9, a very specific vision of future Davidic kingship.²⁹ This line of thought, however, is only one potential political statement afforded within the discursive limits of the book. To be sure, Stromberg's position is not wrong per se, but it is merely one possible position within the book's discursive framework. The Davidic promise, as important as it no doubt was, was overdetermined in Judean discourse.³⁰ The issue of David and Davidic kingship was central to the thinking of the ancient Judean literate community – the issue is pervasive in the community's literature – but there was no uniform way to think about it, even within a single book like Isaiah. And as I argue below, there are other voices in the text, other lines of reading that provide counterpoints to Davidide-focused perspectives, and these are evident in the book's opening chapters as well.

IV

Allow me to cite just a few examples to support that claim, beginning with material in the latter part of the book and then concluding with the book's opening chapters. To be sure, Isaiah 11:1-9 contains a powerful image of an individual Davidic ruler, one who will rule with superhuman capabilities, who will apparently strike down enemies with words (11:4) and judge by sense of smell (11:3; whatever that might actually mean), whose rule will usher in a kind of utopian existence.³¹ This is a conspicuous image that has connections with

29 Stromberg, *Study of Isaiah*, 67-70, 125. To be clear, the text in 65:25 refers specifically to content in 11:6-9, and therefore does not necessarily make reference to any Davidic ruler. Isaiah 66:1, moreover, emphasizes Yahweh's absolute kingship over the heavens and earth. As Stromberg argues, however, it is unlikely that a reader would recognize an allusion to 11:6-9 and then read those verses devoid of their immediate context. In Isaiah 11, it is clear that the scene imagined in vv. 6-9 is dependent upon the rule of the Davidide described in vv. 1-5. And in Isaiah 65 at least, there is nothing that would preclude a Davidic king. Intertextuality is multidirectional: it is possible, of course, that readers would draw on the vision of Isaiah 65 to reimagine that of Isaiah 11, but it is also possible that Isaiah 11 would frame understandings of Isaiah 65. Both readings (and others) would be in play. With such readings in mind, Francis Landy has told me that he understands the end of Isaiah to be "creating a salad of utopian imagery" in its attempt to find closure.

30 See, e.g., Gary N. Knoppers, "David's Relation to Moses: The Contexts, Content and Conditions of the Davidic Promises," in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, ed. John Day, JSOTsup 270 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 91-118.

31 I take the difficult clause in 11:3 (והריחו ביראת יהוה) quite literally, in line with the Davidide's superhuman nature described throughout the passage, which stands in juxta-

9:5-6 and with chs. 32-33 (and perhaps even with 65:25, as mentioned above), thus providing one possible framework for reading the book. But later in the book, in the only passage in all of chs. 40-66 that *explicitly* refers to David or Davidic kingship, we find a rather different image. In Isaiah 55:1-5, Davidic kingship is “democratized”, as it were:³²

Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting [עולם] covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader [נגיד] and commander for the peoples. See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not

position with the description of the Assyrian king in ch. 10. On superhuman kingship in the prophetic books, see Ian D. Wilson, “Faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, able to rule by sense of smell! Superhuman Kingship in the Prophetic Books,” pp. 30-44 in “Not in the Spaces We Know’: An Exploration of Science Fiction and the Bible,” ed. Frauke Uhlenbruch, *JHebS* 16 (2016), article 9 (online: <http://www.jhsonline.org/Articles/article_221.pdf>). Notably, the Davidide’s justice and righteousness, and the peaceful existence that coincides with such rule, was not thought to be out of the ordinary for the imperial regimes of the ancient Near East. Cf. Zech 1:11, e.g., which recognizes the successful rule of the Persian empire (and laments Judah’s continued state of desolation despite Persian successes). It is not only the wolf dwelling with the lamb that is subversive, in Isaiah 11; it is also the means by which that state of existence is brought about.

- 32 A much discussed issue. See, e.g., Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 2: *The Theology of Israel’s Prophetic Traditions*, trans. D.M.G. Stalker (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1965 [German original 1960]), 240; Otto Eissfeldt, “The Promises of Grace to David in Isaiah 55:1-5,” in *Israel’s Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg*, ed. Bernhard W. Anderson and Walter Harrelson (New York: Harper, 1962), 196-207; Kenneth E. Pomykala, *The Davidic Dynasty Tradition in Early Judaism: Its History and Significance for Messianism*, SBL Early Judaism and Its Literature 7 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 38-41; Marvin A. Sweeney, “The Reconceptualization of the Davidic Covenant in Isaiah,” in *Reading Prophetic Books: Form, Intertextuality, and Reception in Prophetic and Post-Biblical Literature*, FAT 89 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014 [original 1997]), 94-113; Scott R.A. Starbuck, “Theological Anthropology at a Fulcrum: Isaiah 55:1-5, Psalm 89, and Second Stage Tradition in the Royal Psalms,” in *David and Zion: Biblical Studies in Honor of J.J.M. Roberts*, ed. Bernard F. Batto and Kathryn L. Roberts (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 247-65; Joseph Blenkinsopp, “The Theological Politics of Deutero-Isaiah,” in *Divination, Politics, and Ancient Near Eastern Empires*, 129-43, esp. 133-35.

know you shall run to you, because of Yahweh your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you. (cf. NRSV)

The language here is keyed to the Davidic promises, the Davidic throne's "everlasting" (עולם) status (e.g., 2 Sam 7:14–16; 22:51; 23:5; Ps 89; etc.), and the king's appointment as a "leader" (גיד) in place of Saul (2 Sam 5:2). But the passage is not concerned with a future Davidide; it is using David as an analogue for the people as a whole. This poor and misguided people (i.e., postmonarchic Judah) is to become, via the power of Yahweh, a ruler of nations: Israel will summon unknown nations and unknown nations will stream to them. The text conjures up a fuzzy image of Davidic and Solomonic renown from long ago, but this time it is the people's renown, *kingly fame for the collective*, not renown for any individual ruler. And note that a few lines below, in 55:12–13, the people return home with such joy that even the mountains and trees applaud them, an event that will stand as an everlasting "sign" (אזכרה) of Yahweh's devotion to his people. So here, one of the book's "signs" – which, as mentioned above, are crucial to Stromberg's reading of the book – indicates a kind of Davidic kingship, indeed, but that kingship has been reconstituted as a collective ideal, as a royal people meant to govern the nations.

Moreover, there are other images in the latter portion of the book that *implicitly* recall Davidic kingship, but which do not necessarily envision or allude to anything like the superhuman Davidide of ch. 11. Take, for example, the presentation of Cyrus in chs. 44–45. In that passage a foreigner – one who according to Deuteronomic law would not be eligible for kingship over Israel (cf. Deut 17:15) – stands as Yahweh's appointed shepherd and temple builder (44:28), as the deity's anointed one (משיח; 45:1). The language in this passage, with its constellation of references to narratives and psalms of Davidic kingship, makes Cyrus a quasi-Davidide, a bridge figure between the ideal for indigenous Judean rule and the reality of foreign imperial dominance. A bridge, of course, at once makes a connection between two separate things *and* acts as a monument to the separation itself. Memorializing Cyrus in this way was one (but certainly not the only) means of negotiating Judah's political identity under imperial rule in the early Second Temple era.³³ Compare also

33 For a full discussion of these issues, see Ian D. Wilson, "Yahweh's Anointed: Cyrus, Deuteronomy's Law of the King, and Yehudite Identity," in *Political Memory in and after the Persian Period*, ed. Jason M. Silverman and Caroline Waerzeggers, ANEM 13 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 325–61 (online: <http://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/pubs/g780884140894_OA.pdf>). See also Jason M. Silverman, "From Remembering to Expecting the 'Messiah': Achaemenid Kingship as (Re)Formulating Apocalyptic Expectations of David," in *Political*

61:1-3, a passage in which the *prophetic figure*, not any king (Davidic or otherwise), speaks of himself as Yahweh's anointed (מִשָּׁח יְהוָה אֲתִי; 61:1), as the one to release the captives and raise up the lowly.³⁴ And it is worth mentioning, too, that when a future Davidide is imagined in other prophetic books (e.g., Jer 23:5-6; 33:12-26; Ezek 34:23-24; 37:24-25; etc.) – texts that were also without question part of the literary repertoire of early Second Temple Judah – he is decidedly more “normal,” more human in his depiction and in his reliance upon other bureaucratic and cultic entities. In those books the envisioned Davidide is not one who rules by sense of smell. The images of future Davidic kingship, both within the book of Isaiah and across the prophetic corpus, were diverse.³⁵

Turning back toward the beginning of the book, in Isa 2:2-4 (cf. Mic 4:1-5) we find yet another image of future rule, and in that image there is no human king at all.³⁶ Instead there is Yahweh alone, with his “instruction” (תּוֹרָה). Nations will gather under him in Jerusalem, where he will “rule” (שָׁפֵט) and “arbitrate” (יָחַד Hiph.) and no one will know war (2:4). In this image there is no readily apparent recollection of David, of the Davidic line, or of any future (super) human manifestation of it; nor are there any recognizable allusions to such things. There is only Yahweh. How then do we understand the interrelationship between this image of Jerusalem's political restoration, and the images cited above, with the image of a powerful and preternatural Davidide in chapter 11? What kind of political vision(s) for the future would the book of Isaiah communicate to its readers?

Citing Ackroyd's famous study, with which I began this paper, I would first point to the structure of the book's opening chapters and how it presents the prophet and his message. I would point out that the image in Isa 2:2-4 mitigates and provides a conclusion to the harsh judgment of Jerusalem presented in much of chapter 1.³⁷ Similarly, I would point out that the Davidide of ch. 11 provides a hopeful subversion of the hubristic Assyrian king in ch. 10, and thus a ballast to the judgmental focus of chapter 10.³⁸ Chapters 1-11, therefore, are bookended with contrasting images of doom and hope, of punishment and

Memory in and after the Persian Period, 419-46, who discusses possible intersections between understandings of Davidic kingship and Persian kingship, in the early Second Temple period and after.

34 Cf. Landy, “I and Eye,” 96.

35 For full discussion of Davidic kingship in the prophetic books, see Ian D. Wilson, *Kingship and Memory in Ancient Judah* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 198-216.

36 On this passage, see Francis Landy, “Torah and Anti-Torah: Isaiah 2:2-4 and 1:10-26,” *BibInt* 11 (2003): 317-34.

37 Cf. Ackroyd, “Isaiah I-XII,” 34, 42-43.

38 Cf. Ackroyd, “Isaiah I-XII,” 44.

restoration. In one (chs. 1-2), the restoration is founded upon Yahweh's sole rule and Torah propagation in Jerusalem, and in the other (chs. 10-11) the return of Davidic kingship provides the peaceful renewal. Chapter 12, then, provides a "colophon", as it were, which reinforces and authorizes the overarching message of what precedes in chs. 1-11 (and thus what follows in the rest of the book).³⁹ "[A]s the prophet is presented in these chapters," writes Ackroyd, "there is clear evidence of the chiaroscuro by which the prospect of the future is set out against the background of a recognition of failure and doom.... [T]he prophet appears to us as a man of judgement and salvation."⁴⁰ Highlighting this ambiguity in the text, and even inferring that the book's vision of the future is somewhat blurry, Ackroyd nonetheless repeatedly hones in on Davidic kingship as the likely final outcome on the political horizon. He reads 6:1-9:6 as the core of chs. 1-12, and argues that 6:13, the obscure reference to a holy seed, points to the famous royal oracle in 9:1-6, which of course foresees David's throne and kingdom being established "forever" (9:6), and which has ties to the vision in chapter 11.

I differ with Ackroyd, however, in how I understand the implications of this apparent literary structure within the book's discourse. As I stated above, I do not wish to refute Ackroyd's influential reading and the work it has informed, only to show that *other readings are possible within the discourse*, which in turn may have an impact on how we understand the book's contribution to ancient Judean politics. Overemphasizing any Davidide-focused reading blinds us to other possibilities in the text, other political visions that the text presents with no less authority.⁴¹ I return here to Francis Landy's observations about the problem of prophetic translation, past and future, a problem that is introduced in the key narrative in ch. 6, and that reinforces itself throughout the book. By interpreting the Davidide figure as the sole (or even main) political savior indicated in the text, we are like Ahaz struggling to receive the prophet's words. The text speaks with one language while we insist on hearing with another. In prophetic literature, rarely is there any inherent, *singular* line of reading, even

39 Cf. Ackroyd, "Isaiah I-XII," 34-40, 44.

40 Ackroyd, "Isaiah I-XII," 45.

41 Cf. Willem A.M. Beuken, "Major Interchanges in the Book of Isaiah Subservient to Its Umbrella Theme: The Establishment of Yhwh's Sovereign Rule at Mt. Zion (Chs. 12-13; 27-28; 39-40; 55-66)," and Ulrich Berges, "Kingship and Servanthood in the Book of Isaiah," both in *The Book of Isaiah: Enduring Questions Answered Anew*, Essays Honoring Joseph Blenkinsopp and His Contribution to the Study of Isaiah, ed. Richard J. Bautch and J. Todd Hibbard (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 113-32 and 159-78, respectively. Each, in different ways, argues that the book promotes Yahweh's kingship over and above any human rule, Davidic or otherwise.

in texts with obvious literary structures. The demarcations between passages blur; possible interrelationships and interpretations multiply, within the discursive limits of any given prophetic book. In recent years Ehud Ben Zvi, among others, has argued extensively that the multivocality of prophetic books would lend itself to “branched modes of reading,” that is, a resistance to reading books and passages within books “in a narrow linear manner.”⁴² In Isaiah 1-12 (and in the book as a whole), for example, ch. 6 is undoubtedly a key passage, a metaprophetic guide to a complex discourse. But we must be careful not to reduce the implication of this key passage to any one possible reading, especially when the passage itself presents a paradox related to matters of understanding and interpretation. (Notice, too, that the vision in ch. 6 begins with reference to *Yahweh’s* kingship, his sitting upon a “high and lofty throne” [v. 1]!) Reading chs. 1-12 with questions of political futures in mind would point toward the Davidic hopes of 9:1-6 and 11:1-9 as counterpoints to the woes and judgments stated in chs. 5 and 9 and in ch. 10, respectively, as Ackroyd argues. But this particular reading would not override or eliminate the import of 2:2-4, for example, which envisions *Yahweh* alone as king of Israel and which introduces themes that echo throughout the entire book;⁴³ nor would it necessarily inform an understanding of the hymn in ch. 12, which caps off the entire unit that includes chs. 1-11 and which again focuses on the might of *Yahweh* alone. The text presents possible readings that stand outside and independent of the Davidide-centered intertextual linkages emphasized by Ackroyd and others. But that is not a problem at all, given the vision of chapter 6. In fact, that is what we should expect.

In other words, even if the end of ch. 6 points to the anticipation of a Davidic ruler in ch. 9 (and thus ch. 11), I would argue that the important vision of *Yahweh* ruling alone, in ch. 2, nonetheless stands, as do other visions of political futures that do not have Davidic kingship in mind whatsoever. The prophetic double-bind of ch. 6 opens up these discursive possibilities in the first place. There are a variety of texts in Isaiah that present images outside the Davidide-focused lines of reading suggested by Ackroyd, Stromberg, and others, thus complicating any singular, unified political vision for Davidic kingship that the

42 Ehud Ben Zvi, “Is the Twelve Hypothesis Likely from an Ancient Reader’s Perspective?” in Ehud Ben Zvi and James D. Nogalski, *Two Sides of a Coin: Juxtaposing Views on Interpreting the Book of the Twelve/Twelve Prophetic Books*, Analecta Gorgiana 201 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2009), 93. See also Francis Landy, “Three Sides of a Coin: In Conversation with Ben Zvi and Nogalski,” *Two Sides of a Coin*, *JHebS* 10 (2010), article 11 (online: <http://www.jhsonline.org/Articles/article_139.pdf>).

43 Cf. H.G.M. Williamson, *Isaiah 1-5*, ICC (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 172.

book might indicate. There is no sure-fire way to argue for the precedence of any one vision over another, in the course of the book. The structure of Isaiah 1-12 itself, with ch. 6 at its foundation, undermines any univocal reading. And in any case, as I highlighted above, what precisely Davidic kingship might mean going forward is not clearly delineated in the book. Will the Davidic promises be reconceptualized in terms of the people as a whole? Might foreign rulers somehow fill the void left by the collapse of the Davidic dynasty? Or is something entirely different on the horizon? For its Judean readers, the book's discourse presented a horizon of possibilities, rather than any one dominant answer. This was not to say that anything goes, or that anything is possible, but that the book set forth certain discursive limits, thought to be envisioned by the prophet Isaiah long ago, in which and by which political conversation could happen.

V

Walzer, in his recent study of the Hebrew Bible, asks, "Is there anything like [political] deliberation in the Bible?"⁴⁴ For the most part he says no, but he also thinks that the function of prophet figures, who commonly interact with rulers and other officials in the public sphere, in both historiographical and prophetic texts, might provide a major exception. After surveying the texts and commenting on how the prophets publicly judge the powers that be, he concludes,

[I]f anything is to come of those judgments [of the prophets], some people, the prophets themselves or the men and women in their audience, must 'speak words' [cf. Hos 10:4], must argue about what ought to be done, and listen to counterarguments, and work toward 'covenants' or agreements, even if these require compromise and accommodation. Politics lie just beyond prophecy, but the biblical prophets, judging from their texts, did not go there.⁴⁵

In the end, then, he does not find real deliberation in the literature, only the possibility of such. His answer to the question, though, is informed by a reading of the texts that searches for point blank description of political deliberation,

44 Walzer, *In God's Shadow*, 73. He asks the question in response to philosopher Stuart Hampshire's claim that all human societies have always debated politics.

45 Walzer, *In God's Shadow*, 88.

for literal public policy debate between power brokers – kings, priests, and prophets.⁴⁶ As I have shown above, there is indeed political deliberation in the literature, arguments about what ought to or could be done, counterarguments and compromise. The deliberation is to be found in the social imaginary of the community's future, the diverse visions of political possibilities represented in prophetic discourse like the book of Isaiah.

Focusing on prophetic books as literary artifacts from the early Second Temple era, as sources for that social and historical milieu, rather than reading them as descriptions of political actors and activities in the eras they describe, provides a different view of political debate in ancient Judah. The very fact that the early Second Temple community produced and read such multivocal and politically inclined literature speaks to the community's deliberations over its political past and future. It is a bit of begging the question to say that literature points to its literary culture, but the statement is true nonetheless. Instead of attempting to reconstruct sociopolitical actors and activities in the histories of ancient Israel and Judah – i.e., unpacking the political functions of kings and kingship, prophets and prophecy, and so on, in the narratives⁴⁷ – we should be thinking of the *literature itself* as a type of sociopolitical actor and activity in its primary milieu.⁴⁸ The literature represents the social remembering of political forces past and future, and it therefore speaks to the present sociopolitical interests of the community that formed the discourse – those who composed, read, propagated, and thus lent authority to, the texts themselves. In this way, the literature may not provide us any direct access to prophetic activity in ancient Israel and Judah or to that activity's interrelationship with politics and

46 Compare, e.g., Max Weber, *Ancient Judaism*, trans. and ed. Hans H. Gerth and Don Martindale (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1952), which Walzer cites throughout his study.

47 See, e.g., Weber's famous study of "the prophet," *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. Ephraim Fischhoff (Boston: Beacon, 1963 [German original 1922]), 46-59; and also his more specific discussion of the biblical prophets' political activities and dispositions, *Ancient Judaism*, 267-335.

48 Referring to the "literature itself," here my comments echo Mario Liverani's well-known thoughts about ancient historiographical literature (see his "Memorandum on the Approach to Historiographic Texts," *Orientalia* 42 [1973]: 178-94), and indeed I have argued elsewhere that we should think of the prophetic books as having existed in a kind of meta-generic relationship with the historiographical (see Wilson, *Kingship and Memory in Ancient Judah*, esp. chs. 5 and 6). Cf. Michael H. Floyd, "New Form Criticism and Beyond: The Historicity of the Prophetic Literature Revisited," in *The Book of the Twelve and the New Form Criticism*, ed. Mark J. Boda, Michael H. Floyd, and Colin M. Toffelmire, ANEM 10 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 17-36 (online: <https://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/pubs/9781628370614_OA.pdf>), who asks: "[W]ere the writers of the prophetic books in some sense historiographers?" (18).

political figures prior to the Second Temple – a point that scholarship on the prophetic books has made for some time now. But the literature does give us some sense of how the community that produced and read prophetic literature *thought about* such past figures and, thus, how this thinking might have informed the community's understandings of its own present sociopolitical situations.⁴⁹ These sources are, then, still very useful for historical discussions of politics in ancient Judah.

What I would like to do, to conclude, is to promote the prophetic books as invaluable sources for accessing Judeans' lived experience of politics in the early Second Temple period, in order to make ongoing and significant contributions to the knowledge of broader political contexts in the ancient Near East. Historians of the ancient world have made a number of strides in recent years in this direction, which I think could provide some guidance to our study of politics and prophetic literature within the context of empire.⁵⁰ What these recent studies attempt to get at is the "discrepant identities" of peoples in the

49 Cf. Floyd, "New Form Criticism and Beyond," who discusses how collections of oracles associated with particular prophetic personages might have come to form prophetic books in ancient Judah. He writes, "Just as the scribal authors found typological connections among the collected oracles, which suggest typological connections with their present situation, readers of prophetic texts were to look for typological connections among the various sections of prophetic books that suggest typological connections with their present situation" (29). Notably, Floyd argues, too, that the prophetic personages associated with prophetic books were at least imagined to have been real, historical prophets, who prophesied about real, historical events, in Israel's and Judah's pasts (31-35).

50 An exemplary work is David J. Mattingly, *Imperialism, Power, and Identity: Experiencing the Roman Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011). For studies that make similar contributions, but with regard to the Persian period of the Near East, see, e.g., Elspeth R.M. Dussinberre, *Empire, Authority, and Autonomy in Achaemenid Anatolia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Henry P. Colburn, "The Archaeology of Achaemenid Rule in Egypt" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2014); and idem, "The Sixth Satrapy: The Archaeology of Egypt under Achaemenid Rule," *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 5 (2013), 12-13 (a short summary of the dissertation). In biblical studies, see, e.g., Göran Eidevall, "Propagandistic Constructions of Empires in the Book of Isaiah," and Ehud Ben Zvi, "The Yehudite Collection of Prophetic Books and Imperial Contexts," both in *Divination, Politics, and Ancient Near Eastern Empires*, 109-28 and 145-69, respectively. Ben Zvi's work offers some preliminary observations about how Judean literati remembered and imagined empire, including the positive (though limited) portrayals of Persia, under which the Jerusalem temple was rebuilt, and the mixed (mostly negative, some positive) portrayals of Assyria and Babylon, the hubristic regimes that played crucial roles in the narratives of exile. Eidevall's study is mainly diachronic, in that he reconstructs different stages of development in the book of Isaiah that he sees as corresponding to different eras of Judah's historical existence under empire (Assyrian, Babylonian, and

ancient world and how these identities related to “discrepant experience” under imperial rule, as classicist David Mattingly phrases it.⁵¹ New archaeological and epigraphic studies of Persian-controlled Anatolia and Egypt, for example, are fine tuning what we know about imperial authority and local autonomy in those regions, showing how different sociocultural categories (e.g., the military, education, trade and consumption, worship of divinity, etc.) took various forms depending upon the specifics of sociopolitical contexts.⁵² Today, the claim that identities are discrepant or plural or multiform may be old hat, but how such identities are negotiated in any given context, at any given time, is not. With the abundance of new Persian-period archaeological data coming out of Israel (e.g., Ramat Rahel), and with more specific knowledge of how others experienced empire across the Near East, there is ample opportunity to make great gains in our work on ancient Judah. The prophetic literature and its discourses can and should play major parts in these investigations, alongside the newly available archaeological and epigraphic data.

In biblical studies there have been some important recent contributions along these lines. See, for example, the volumes authored and edited by scholars like Ehud Ben Zvi, Jon Berquist, Louis Jonker, and Oded Lipschits, among others. Also insightful are two recent collections in the Society of Biblical Literature’s ANEM series, both of which I have noted above, and both of which are open-access, online publications: *Political Memory in and after the Persian Period*, edited by Jason Silverman and Caroline Waerzeggers (<http://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/pubs/9780884140894_OA.pdf>); and *Divination, Politics, and Ancient Near Eastern Empires*, edited by Alan Lenzi and Jonathan Stökl (<http://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/pubs/9781589839984_OA.pdf>). Prophetic literature in particular is especially important for such study because it contains a discursive horizon that provides us access, however limited, to ancient Judean thinking about sociopolitical matters, past and future, and it thus shows us how these matters were brought into conversation, how the early Second Temple-period community responsible for the books “deliberated” over the issues, over the course of that era. No other corpus of Judean literature offers such rich, multivocal discourse.

In this essay I have focused on deliberation in the book of Isaiah over hopes for future rule, mostly with reference to David and the Davidic dynasty, but

Persian), but his concluding comments, which briefly offer a “macrostructural view” of the book, take steps toward the kind of approach I am advocating here (see 126-28).

51 See Mattingly, *Imperialism, Power, and Identity*, esp. 203-45.

52 See, e.g., Dusinberre, *Empire, Authority, and Autonomy*; and Colburn, “Archaeology of Achaemenid Rule.”

also with reference to other hopes. To put things in Mattingly's terms of identity, the book reflects a community, in which and for which the text emerged, that "discrepantly" identified with various future political hopes, and this political imaginary was related to "discrepant" memories of the community's political past. The better we understand the discrepant voices in the discourse and their interrelationship, the better we can understand the lives of the community and its political concerns, to which the text gives us some access. Our questions, though, should not focus exclusively on "top down" political interests, that is, issues of governance and administration, of royal and imperial regimes. To cite Mattingly again, we should attempt "to look at society from the top down, the bottom up, and sideways on."⁵³ In Isaiah, for example, we might investigate how the discourse presents deliberations over local wealth, status, and gender (see, e.g., the issues presented in Isa 3-4), alongside and in relation to its presentation of politics past and future, in the ancient Judean context and with reference to similar deliberations in the broader Persian imperial world. This sort of investigation would further illuminate our understandings of ancient Judah, and thus our ongoing reading of prophetic literature, with all its diverse politics.

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53 Mattingly, *Imperialism, Power, and Identity*, 273.

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Recreating Jerusalem: Trito-Isaiah's Vision for the Reconstruction of the City

Kenneth Ristau

Judean literature indicates that Jerusalem's destruction by the Babylonians in 587 BCE, and its slow recovery, triggered a theological crisis (with potentially existential implications). The earliest tremors of this crisis are reflected in laments, especially Lamentations and Psalms 44, 69, 74, 79, 89, 102, and 137. The theology of these texts is generally consistent, conveying grief-suffused confessions of corporate guilt, anguish over severed relations with Yahweh, and horror at the ruination and disgrace of Jerusalem and her inhabitants. To be sure, this literature frames these concerns within a worldview and liturgical practices in which Jerusalem's preeminence and Yahweh's sovereignty remain important and a diversity of belief and dissent – e.g., any radical impiety – is muted. Yet in late prophetic literature and historiography, counter-narratives that go even further are preserved. Opposition and reluctance to rebuilding and settling in the city are noted (Hag 1:1-11; Zech 8:4-8; Ezra 4; Neh 4:1-12; 11:1-2) and many texts appear to reflect the challenges of restoring the temple and maintaining enthusiasm for tithes and offerings (Hag 2:3; Mal 1:6-14; 3:8-12; Ezra 3:12-13; Neh 13:10-13). This apathy or disregard may have come especially from those who, in addition to worshipping Yahweh, also venerated other deities (Isa 57:3-13; 65:3-4; 66:3, 17; Jer 44) and/or worshipped at other cult sites (Isa 19:18-19; Jer 41:4-5; Zech 7:2-3).

Indeed, although retrospectively Yahwism seems inextricably linked with Jerusalem, the lack of explicit references to the city in the Torah raises significant doubts about the pervasiveness of its importance in Yahwistic circles. In fact, the Torah not only neglects Jerusalem, it accords great significance to other Yahwistic sites such as Shechem (Gen 12:6-7; 33:18-20), Bethel (Gen 12:8; 28; 31; 35), Hebron (Gen 13:18; 23:2, 19), Mount Sinai (Exod 3-4; 19; 24:15-18; Deut 4-5; 33:2), and Mounts Gerizim and Ebal (Deut 11:29-30; 27:4, 12-13). Even though Jerusalem is possibly identified by alternate names and allusions (e.g., Salem in Gen 14:18; cf. Ps 76:2), the refusal to make the connection explicit suggests either an uncertainty about the city's status and future and, therefore, a reluctance to commit to its elevation, or a deliberate attempt to decouple the narratives from the explicit locale of Jerusalem (presumably because of the delegitimizing effect of its destruction or because of ambivalence or even out-

right hostility towards the city and the cultic claims made for it).¹ This evidence raises a provocative and important counterfactual: What if Yahwists had altogether abandoned the Davidic covenant and with it, Jerusalem as a sacred site?

The scribes of Persian period prophetic literature, especially Deutero-Isaiah (D_I) and Trito-Isaiah (T_I), appear to have been acutely aware of this potentiality and sought to address it.² Of all the biblical texts, Isaiah contains the most eloquent and sustained reflections on Jerusalem.³ Jerusalem, as a city *and* community, in relationship with Israel and Yahweh, is its persistent and arguably primary focus – a point that has, more recently, factored into studies of the *raison d'être* for the development of the Isaiah tradition.⁴ The book of Isaiah

- 1 Yairah Amit, *Hidden Polemics in Biblical Narrative*, trans. Jonathan Chipman (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 130-168, has already identified this important issue and discusses each of the possible references to Jerusalem: Salem in Abram's encounter with Melchizedek (Gen 14:17-20), the land of the Jebusites in the covenant ceremony in Genesis 15:7-21, Mount Moriah in the Akedah (Gen 22), as well as the place that Yahweh will choose throughout Deuteronomy and the "dwelling between his shoulders" (Deut 33:12). Amit argues that the refusal to name the site reflects uncertainty about its status and also a theology that privileges the whole land of Israel and the holiness of the people over centralization in Jerusalem (167-168). N.B. Updating or clarifying glosses are very common in the Torah, as, e.g., with Bethel/Luz (Gen 28:19) and other sites (Gen 22:14; 26:33; 35:20; Deut 3:14).
- 2 Internal evidence points to the genesis of Isaiah in the eighth century with ongoing development and supplementation only culminating in the production of a stable prophetic text in the Persian or early Hellenistic period. Although certainly open to criticism, Williamson and Stromberg, taken together, have constructed a useful and coherent compositional theory, see *The Book Called Isaiah: Deutero-Isaiah's Role in Composition and Redaction* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994) and *Isaiah After Exile: The Author of Third Isaiah as Reader and Redactor of the Book* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) respectively. Their essential insight for my purposes is that D_I and T_I were never independent compositions and each shaped a tradition that they inherited. Taking such a view, it is also not impossible to accept the argument for the essential unity of the composition, see Menahem Haran, "The Literary Structure and Chronological Framework of the Prophecies in Isa XL–XLVIII," in *Congress Volume: Bonn 1962* (Leiden: Brill, 1963), 127-155; Benjamin D. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40–66* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 187-195. For those interested in other contrasting views, they are well represented by Williamson and Stromberg but see also, Ulrich Berges, *The Book of Isaiah: Its Composition and Final Form*, trans. Millard C. Lind (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2012).
- 3 The Book of Psalms is, perhaps, an exception to this statement, particularly with respect to the Songs of Ascent and Royal Psalms. The promotion of Jerusalem, however, is not a sustained concern throughout the book.
- 4 On the identity of Israel in Isaiah, see H.G.M. Williamson, "The Concept of Israel in Transition," in *The World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, Anthropological and Political Perspectives*, ed. Ronald E. Clements (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 141-160; Gary N. Knoppers,

appears to have evolved, at least in part, as a *lieu de mémoire* (a “site of memory”) for scribal reflections on Jerusalem. D1 reflects this priority, right at the outset, with a message of hope for the devastated city, “Speak to the heart of Jerusalem, and announce to her that her service is fulfilled, that her guilt is settled, that she has received from Yahweh’s hand double for all her sins” (40:2).

In D1 and T1, the reconstruction of Jerusalem and its temple is a vital fulfillment of the command to console the city – addressing the ideological and practical challenges to that process, is consistently at the forefront of these prophetic texts.⁵ T1 picks up motifs and themes from D1 but moves away from

“Did Jacob Become Judah?: The Configuration of Israel’s Restoration in Deutero-Isaiah,” in *Samaria, Samaritans, Samaritans: Studies on Bible, History and Linguistics*, ed. József Zsengellér (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 39–67; “Who or What is Israel in Trito-Isaiah?” in *Let Us Go Up to Zion: Essays in Honour of H.G.M. Williamson on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, eds. Iain Provan and Mark Boda (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 153–165. Regardless of the merits of their compositional theories, on the literary and redactional significance of Jerusalem, see esp. Christopher R. Seitz, *Zion’s Final Destiny: The Development of the Book of Isaiah; A Reassessment of Isaiah 36–39* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991); Antti Laato, “About Zion I will not be silent”: *The Book of Isaiah as an Ideological Unity* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1998); Berges, *Book of Isaiah*.

- 5 A tendency among scholars to downplay the importance of the temple most likely reflects the small number of explicit references to it in either D1 or T1 and a tendency to see T1 as an opponent of hierocratic power in the Persian period. Scholars have asserted that D1 has little to no interest in the Jerusalem temple, see, e.g., John L. McKenzie, *Second Isaiah: Introduction, Translation and Notes* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968); Klaus Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah: A Commentary on Isaiah 40–55*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 220, 315; and, that T1 is even critical of it, see Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic: The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 172–173, 178; Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, “The Haughtiness of the Priesthood (Isa 65,5),” *Biblica* 85 (2004): 237–244; *Priestly Rites and Prophetic Rage: Post-Exilic Prophetic Critique of the Priesthood* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006); Valerie A. Stein, *Anti-Cultic Theology in Christian Biblical Interpretation: A Study of Isaiah 66:1–4 and its Reception* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007). Scholars have noted that הֵיכָל (“Temple”) occurs only twice, in Isaiah 44:28 and 66:6 and that T1 appears to censure priestly practices and the temple (e.g., in Isa 66:1–6) and promotes, presumably in opposition to prevailing authorities in Jerusalem, a utopian and inclusive, even universal, priesthood (e.g., in Isa 56:1–8; 66:18–23). In his particularly influential thesis, Hanson argued for opposing hierocratic and visionary parties – D1 and T1 aligned with the latter – as implicit in this rhetoric and that of other post-exilic sources. Hanson’s work has been heavily criticized for a negative view of the priestly tradition and reproducing a false opposition between priest and prophet. See Jon D. Levenson, “The Temple and the World,” *Journal of Religion* 64 (1984): 275–298; Alexander Rofé, “Isaiah 66:1–4: Judean Sects in the Persian Period as Viewed by Trito-Isaiah,” in *Biblical and Related Studies Presented to Samuel Iwry*, eds. Ann Kort and Scott Morschauser (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1985), 205–217; Brooks Schramm, *The Opponents of Third Isaiah: Reconstructing the Cultic History of the Restoration* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995);

an emphasis on movement towards Jerusalem and devotes more attention to issues touching on the constitution of the community. The opening oracle of T1 immediately centers attention on the purpose of the servant's mission to bring forth justice and the exhortations to ethical living in Isaiah 40–55: "So says Yahweh: Uphold justice (משפט) and act with righteousness (צדקה) for soon my salvation (ישועה) is coming and my righteousness (צדקה) is being revealed!" (56:1).⁶ This incipient oracle links ethics with the anticipated *parousia* and restoration; and, links the issue of identity – that is, the identity of the righteous and the unrighteous – with reconstruction (e.g., 57:14; 58:12). T1, therefore, approaches the physical reconstruction and restoration of Jerusalem and the temple from a significantly different perspective than D1. While borrowing motifs and themes from D1, T1 places considerably more emphasis on the nature of the city and community, emphasizing its sacred status as a foun-

and, more generally on this false dichotomy, Ehud Ben Zvi, "Observations on Prophetic Characters, Prophetic Texts, Priests of Old, Persian Period Priests and Literati," in *The Priest in the Prophets: The Portrayal of the Priests, Prophets and Other Religious Specialists in the Latter Prophets*, eds. Lester L. Grabbe and Alice O. Bellis (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 19–30; Ziony Zevit, "The Prophet versus Priest Antagonism Hypothesis: Its History and Origin," in *The Priest in the Prophets: The Portrayal of the Priests, Prophets and Other Religious Specialists in the Latter Prophets*, eds. Lester L. Grabbe and Alice O. Bellis (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 189–217. The idea that T1, in particular, is the product of a sectarian, millenarian, and/or early apocalyptic group excluded from the cult and in conflict with a Jerusalem establishment remains, even among Hanson's ardent critics, see Levenson, "Temple and World," 296; Rofé, "Isaiah 66:1–4," 216. Schramm, *Opponents*, and Stromberg, *Isaiah After Exile*, are among those that have partially responded to this tendency. Note, however, neither scholar has fully unpacked the prophet's positive concern for the temple; they have only shown that passages previously interpreted as unfavorable towards the temple are not so. Levenson, "Temple and World"; *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Ulrich Berges, "Gottesgarten und Tempel: Die neue Schöpfung im Jesajabuch," in *Gottesstadt und Gottesgarten: Zu Geschichte und Theologie des Jerusalemer Tempels*, eds. Othmar Keel and Erich Zenger (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder Verlag, 2002), 69–98; "Der neue Himmel und Die neue Erde im Jesajabuch: Eine Auslegung zu Jesaja 65:17 und 66:22," in *The New Things: Eschatology in Old Testament Prophecy: Festschrift for Henk Leene*, eds. Ferenc Postma, Klaas Spronk, and Eep Talstra (Maastricht: Utigeverij Shaker, 2002), 9–15, make perhaps the strongest case for the temple as a central concern, though Levenson, as just mentioned, is not able to escape the portrait of a marginal and excluded sectarian group and Berges slightly deflects the issue by privileging/focusing on the temple as community.

- 6 Rolf Rendtorff, *Canon and Theology: Overtures to an Old Testament Theology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 183, observes that Isaiah 56:1 uniquely reflects both the pairing of משפט and צדקה, specific to P1, and ישועה and צדקה, specific to D1, which is strong evidence that T1, or as Rendtorff prefers, Steck's "Greater Isaiah," has inherited both texts (see note 2 *supra*).

dation for ethical exhortations. T1 argues that a new city of faithful Yahwists can be or will be the progenetrix of (a restored) Israel. The argument has four critical components: (1) T1 presents Jerusalem in the tradition of ANE divine cities, (2) T1 argues that this status as a divine city carries ethical obligations for those who would inhabit it, (3) T1 argues that Jerusalem restored will be the progenetrix of Israel, and so (4) T1 affirms the priority of rebuilding Jerusalem and identifies those who neglect it as enemies of Yahweh.

The Theological Foundation of the City

Although many commentators have noted D1's exceptional ability to critique and even satirize Babylonian mythology, T1's facility with myth is not typically recognized. T1, however, not only proves capable of understanding the polemic of D1 but also capable of mythopoeia that weaves together elements of D1 and broader ANE themes to promote the pre-eminence of Jerusalem and the temple. The ethical dimension of T1, though seemingly T1 at its most practical and relevant, is part of this mythopoeia – all of which asserts and affirms the theological foundations and priority of the city of Jerusalem.

T1 evidently recognized in D1, and develops, several critical images commonly associated with the theological foundation of cities. In particular, D1, and so T1, reflects a common homology associating sacred space with the cosmos, epitomized in the typical ANE merism “the heavens and the earth.”⁷ The

7 Mircea Eliade's seminal work on sacred space forcefully argues that its association with heaven and earth is a universal phenomenon of *homo religiosus*, see *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard Trask (San Diego: Harcourt, 1959). Such a homological relationship between the cosmos and the temple is integral to Isaianic theology at its earliest stages. The programmatic call of the prophet in Isaiah 6, regarded by Williamson (see *infra* and note 2 *supra*) as part of the first stage of the composition and influential for all tradents of the Isaiah, is especially pertinent because the passage assumes and blurs distinctions between the two. Yahweh is seated on a “high and exalted” (רם ונשא) throne yet the hem of his robe fills the temple (6:1), while the seraphs declare that his glory fills the whole earth (6:3). In the prophet's subsequent encounter with the seraphs, it is not entirely clear whether the setting is the temple or heaven or, more likely, the temple is acting as a conduit or axis mundi, linking heaven and earth. Williamson, *Book Called Isaiah*, 37–38, argues that Isaiah 40:1–8 is styled on Isaiah 6, especially given the relatively unique parallels to “a voice calling” (6:4; 40:3) and to “a voice speaking” (6:8; 40:6) and a shared emphasis on the glory of God (6:3; 40:5). Both narratives presume an audience with Yahweh, even though a setting in the heavenly council is not explicit. Williamson also demonstrates that the influence of Isaiah 6 is evident in other parts of D1 and even T1 (38–56). Indeed, Stromberg, *Isaiah After Exile*, 160–174, has made a strong case

homology has several components and attendant motifs, especially in its ANE manifestations. Cities were perceived to be a locus of divine-human relations; deities chose cities, involved themselves in its construction or in the construction of the central sanctuary, resided in the city and temple, ensured its defense, and granted legitimacy to the ruling dynast.⁸ The literary and actual topography of the city often included a cosmic mountain, either a true mountain or a ziggurat, as a particularly intimate locus for divine-human contact and a conduit between heaven and earth (56:7; 57:13; 65:11; 66:20).⁹ Gardens and flowing water were also typical of the topographical inventory, evoking primeval rivers or heavenly settings (51:3; 58:11).¹⁰ Cities could be personified and even deified to reflect their symbolic importance within the community (40:9; 49:14; 52:1-2;

that T1 alludes to this passage, especially in Isaiah 57, and adds 6:13bβ to Isaiah 6 to imbue a sense of hope regarding the restoration. In the latter argument, Stromberg is following Williamson, *Book Called Isaiah*, 35. There is explicit recognition of the idea that the tabernacle and temple symbolized the cosmos in early Jewish literature, see, e.g., Josephus, *Ant.*, 3.123, 180-187; Philo, *Moses*, 2.6 [88], 12 [117].

- 8 See Marc Van de Mieroop, *The Ancient Mesopotamian City* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 46-50, who highlights the dual role of religious and political center in Mesopotamian cities; Joan Westenholz, "The Theological Foundation of the City, The Capital City and Babylon," in *Capital Cities: Urban Planning and Spiritual Dimensions; Proceedings of the Symposium Held on May 27-29, 1996, Jerusalem, Israel*, ed. Joan G. Westenholz (Jerusalem: Bible Lands Museum, 1998), 43-54, and Martti Nissinen, "City as Lofty as Heaven: Arbela and Other Cities in Neo-Assyrian Prophecy," in *'Every City Shall Be Forsaken': Urbanism and Prophecy in Ancient Israel and the Near East*, eds. Lester L. Grabbe and Robert Haak (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 172-209, who survey the portrayal of cities in relevant Mesopotamian texts; D.C.T. Sheriffs, "A Tale of Two Cities' – Nationalism in Zion and Babylon," *Tyndale Bulletin* 39 (1988): 19-57, who compares the portrayal of Babylon and Jerusalem along these lines; and, Moshe Weinfeld, "Jerusalem – A Political and Spiritual Capital," in *Capital Cities: Urban Planning and Spiritual Dimensions; Proceedings of the Symposium Held on May 27-29, 1996, Jerusalem, Israel*, ed. Joan G. Westenholz (Jerusalem: Bible Lands Museum, 1998), 15-40, who traces such ideas about Jerusalem through biblical events and literature.
- 9 On the cosmic mountain in comparative religion, see the seminal work of Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1958), 367-387; and, with a focus on West Semitic religion, Richard J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972). Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), draws on these comparative studies to explicate the theological rendering of the motif in the Hebrew Bible.
- 10 On rivers and trees in ancient Mesopotamian cosmology, William F. Albright, "The Mouth of the Rivers," *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature* 35 (1919): 161-195, remains instructive. Using Eden as a starting point, see Terje Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*:

60:13; 62:11; 66:8).¹¹ Cities with strong theological pedigrees functioned as political and cultic capitals with royal and divine enthronement liturgy integral to the mythopoeia (40:9-11; 60).¹² To this end, the ubiquitous motif of the divine warrior was often deployed to emphasize the deity's role as civic defender or avenger (42:10-43:8; 49:25-26; 59:15-20 62:10-63:6).¹³ The divine warrior motif celebrated the defeat of enemies or, more abstractly, chaos, as a precursor to royal or divine enthronement in the city or temple (45:1-3; 51:9-10).¹⁴ Processions with cultic vessels or tribute (45:14; 49:22-23; 52:11; 55:5; 60; 66:18-20) and descriptions of inlays and appointments (54:11-12) also strengthen the homology. Interestingly, the confluence of all these images or motifs is evident in

Genesis 2-3 and Symbolism of the Eden Garden in Biblical Hebrew Literature (Leuven: Peeters, 2000). On the garden of God in Isaiah, see Berges, "Gottesgarten und Tempel."

- 11 On the personification and deification of cities, see Aloysius Fitzgerald, "Mythological Background for the Presentation of Jerusalem as a Queen and False Worship as Adultery in the OT," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 34 (1972): 403-416; "BTWLT and BT as Titles for Capital Cities," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 37 (1975): 167-183; Mark E. Biddle, "The Figure of Lady Jerusalem: Identification, Deification and Personification of Cities in the Ancient Near East," in *The Biblical Canon in Comparative Perspective*, eds. K. Lawson Younger, William W. Hallo, and Bernard F. Batto (Lewistown, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 1991), 173-194; Westenholz, "Theological Foundation."
- 12 On divine and royal enthronement, see the classic works of Henri S. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948); and, Ivan Engnell, *Studies in Divine Kingship in the Ancient Near East* (2nd ed., Oxford: Blackwell, 1967). On the close relationship between enthronement and capital cities in literary formula, see Giorgio Buccellati, "The Enthronement of the King and the Capital City in Texts from Ancient Mesopotamia and Syria," in *Studies Presented to A. Leo Oppenheim, June 7, 1964* (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1964), 54-61. On these themes in regards to Jerusalem/Zion and biblical literature, see Ben C. Ollenburger, *Zion, the City of the Great King: A Theological Symbol of the Jerusalem Cult* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987); Weinfeld, "Jerusalem"; and, many of the essays in Bernard F. Batto and Kathryn L. Roberts, eds., *David and Zion: Biblical Studies in Honor of J.J.M. Roberts* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2004).
- 13 On the divine warrior motif, see Frank M. Cross, "The Divine Warrior in Israel's Early Cult," in *Biblical Motifs: Origins and Transformations*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 11-30; Patrick D. Miller, *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973); Sa-Moon Kang, *Divine War in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989); and, more specific to D1 and T1, see Hanson, *Dawn of Apocalyptic*. Sheriffs, "Tale of Two Cities," emphasizes the divine warrior motif in his comparison of the civic ideologies of Babylon and Jerusalem.
- 14 Susan Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 21-24, provides a useful summary of this "victory-enthronement" pattern.

comparative literature, such as the Babylonian creation epic, *Enūma Eliš*, which seems to have exerted some influence on the composition of DI.¹⁵ The motifs, however, permeate in whole or in part many different types of texts – myths, epics, hymns, prophecy, and historiography – in many different historical periods; place names and personal names even reflect this pervasive homology.¹⁶ Many exemplars of these motifs date as far back as the Sumerian period, indicating the broad temporal range and embeddedness of the language in the ANE literary and mythological mindscape. One particularly insightful exemplar is the Hymn of Enlil, which evinces a critical ethical dimension. Weinfeld has observed that this Hymn's appeal to righteousness and justice in Nippur reverberates in the Isaianic phrases "righteousness dwelled in her" in Isaiah 1:21 and "city of justice, the faithful city" in Isaiah 1:26, texts likely composed by T1.¹⁷ The shared conviction of the Hymn and Isaiah (especially, P1 and T1) is that

15 On the Babylonian *zeitgeist* and its influence on DI, see Peter Machinist, "Mesopotamian Imperialism and Israelite Religion: A Case Study from the Second Isaiah," in *Symbiosis, Symbolism, and the Power of the Past: Canaan, Ancient Israel, and Their Neighbors from the Late Bronze Age Through Roman Palaestina; Proceedings of the Centennial Symposium, W.F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research and American Schools of Oriental Research, Jerusalem, May 29-31, 2000*, eds. William Dever and Seymour Gitin (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 237-264. For a close reading and structural analysis of *Enūma Eliš*, as well as discussion of its themes, see Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 167-191. On the influence of the epic, see Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40-55: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 106-108, 205, 207, 225, 236, 267, 293, 332, 343.

16 Westenholz, "Theological Foundation."

17 Moshe Weinfeld, "Ancient Near Eastern Patterns in Prophetic Literature," *Vetus Testamentum* 27 (1977): 194-195. Many scholars have noted connections between Isaiah 1 and 65-66 and, therefore, suggested that T1 reorganized, shaped, and supplemented the materials to create an introduction appropriate to the whole book. For relevant discussion, see Leon J. Liebreich, "The Compilation of the Book of Isaiah," *Jewish Quarterly Review, New Series* 46 (1956): 259-277; Marvin A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-4 and the Post-Exilic Understanding of the Isaianic Tradition* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1988), 21-24; W.A.M. Beuken, "Isaiah Chapters lxx-lxxvi: Trito-Isaiah and the Closure of the Book of Isaiah," in *Congress Volume: Leuven 1989*, ed. John A. Emerton (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 204-221; Anthony Tomasino, "Isaiah 1.1-24 and 63-66, and the Composition of the Isaianic Corpus," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 57 (1993): 81-98; David Carr, "Reading Isaiah from Beginning (Isaiah 1) to End (Isaiah 56-66): Multiple Modern Possibilities," in *New Visions of Isaiah*, eds. Roy F. Melugin and Marvin A. Sweeney (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 188-218; H.G.M. Williamson, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 1-27, Volume 1: Isaiah 1-5* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 7-162; Stromberg, *Isaiah After Exile*, 147-160.

only ethical behavior is acceptable in a divine city (e.g., Isa 2:2-4; 4; 11:9; 33:5, 14-15; 65:25).

The Ethical Dimension and the Sabbath

TI intimately develops this ethical dimension of civic mythopoeia by relating it to reverence of the Sabbath. In TI's opening exhortation, observing and revering the Sabbath in 56:2 is a practical application of the imperative in 56:1 to uphold justice and righteousness. Revering the Sabbath is further emphasized by another injunction in 58:13-14, at the mid-point between two more detailed exhortations on justice and righteousness in 58:1-12 and 59:1-8. In these exhortations, TI criticizes economic injustice and expands the Sabbath concept to include abstention from commercial activities. In turn, observance of the Sabbath, being a condition for admission to the temple, is presented as critical to the repossession, reconstruction, and revitalization of Jerusalem.

In 58:1-59:8, TI highlights several socio-economic and legal problems affecting the community. TI portrays a disordered community, beset by "dispute" (ריב), "dissent" (מצה), and "aggression" (הכות באגרף רשע) according to 58:4. In 58:9, Yahweh invites the people to "give up" (תסיר) the "yoke" (מוטה), "raising a finger" (שלח אצבע), and "speaking unjustly" (דבר־און), which is echoed again in Isaiah 59:3 and more explicitly connected with legal issues in 59:4. According to Isaiah 59:4, "no one" in the community "issues a legitimate summons" (אין־קרא בצדק) or "judges honestly" (אין נשפט באמונה); instead, they "rely on chaos" (בטוח על־תהוה), "speaking lies" (דבר־שוא), "creating hardship" (הרו עמל), and "producing injustice" (הוליד און). In the starkest language, the prophet claims that the community commits "deeds of violence" (פעל חמס) in 59:6 and "hastens to shed innocent blood" (וימהרו לשפך דם נקי) in 59:7.

The vocabulary of the discourse emphasizes economic injustice, especially in Isaiah 58:3-12, a discrete section within 58:1-59:8 devoted to the topic of fasting. In this passage, TI argues that the true nature of fasting is not ritual self-affliction (vv. 3a, 5) but rather practical self-sacrifice (vv. 6-10). TI introduces the argument by condemning those who "pursue pleasure" (תמצאו־חפץ) and "oppress all your workers" (כל־עבביכם תנגשו). The root of the verb translated "oppress" is נגש, and typically implies enslavement and, in the economic domain, alludes to exploitation, especially of bonded or pledged labor. In 58:6-7, TI presents fasting as a response to this oppression:

Is not this a fast that I choose? To loosen the chains of injustice, unfasten the straps of a yoke (מוטה), and release the oppressed (ושלח רצוצים חפשים),

removing every yoke (מוטה)? Is it not to share your food with the hungry, and to bring home the suffering homeless? When you see [someone] naked, you cover him! You do not hide yourself from your own kin!

Consistent with the introduction, the primary abuse to be undone in v. 6 is likely economic, further alluding to and criticizing the practice of taking bonded or pledged labor in lieu of interest or in default of capital payments.¹⁸ The idiom שלח הפשים (“release” or “let go free”) is revealing, as it is, with but one exception in Job 39:5, only “used elsewhere of the manumission of [commercial and domestic] slaves (Exod 21:26-27; Deut 15:12-13, 18; Jer 34:8-16).”¹⁹ The rhetoric in v. 7 – to aid the hungry, homeless, and naked on the grounds of common kinship – strengthens the economic context of the statements by implying a subsistence crisis, which could lead to foreclosure on property and human pledges, and so exacerbate famine and increase homelessness, poverty, and debt slavery. True fasting is a voluntary, deliberate abstention from self-interest in order to alleviate this distress.

At the mid-point, in 58:13-14, TI relates this ethical obligation to the Sabbath by exhorting the community to refrain from “pursuing your pleasures on my holy day.” The concern with “pursuing pleasure” links Isaiah 58:13 with 58:3 and structures the entire complaint (תמצאוך הפך in 58:3; עשות הפציד in 58:13; and, ממצוא הפצד also in 58:13).²⁰ This repetition, in addition to providing structure, signals that the enclosed passage is an amplification or definition; “to pursue pleasure” is defined as economic exploitation and social neglect (58:4). TI, therefore, not only calls for Sabbath observance but belongs to a tradition that extends the prohibition against land cultivation on the Sabbath to commercial activities.²¹

This concern for the Sabbath concept is especially significant because observing “my Sabbaths” (שבתותי) is identified in Isaiah 56:3-4 as a criterion of admission to the temple. As Levenson notices, “who observe my Sabbaths”

18 Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 179.

19 Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66*, 179.

20 Note also the thematic parallels related to “taking pleasure” in Yahweh: דעת דרכי יחפצון in Isaiah 58:2 and תתענג עליהוה in 58:14, and see also התענגתם ענג to הפץ in 66:11. There is a progression from the verbal forms of הפץ, undoubtedly informed by the treatise on “pursuing (selfish) pleasure” in 58:3-14. The true adherent to Yahweh not only takes pleasure in Yahweh but finds in Yahweh complete satisfaction and joy, which contrasts with the selfish pleasure that leads to division and dissent within the community.

21 Rofé, “Isaiah 66:1-4.”

(אשר ישמרו את־שבתותי) in 56:4 exhibits verbal and contextual links with Leviticus 19:30 and 26:2 and Exodus 31:13.²² Leviticus 19:30 and 26:2 preserve the twofold instructions to “observe my Sabbaths and revere my sanctuary” (את־שבתתי תשמרו ומקדשי תיראו) while Exodus 31:13 is part of a pericope that concludes Yahweh’s instructions concerning the construction and operation of the Tabernacle, and that identifies the observation of “my Sabbaths” (שבתתי) as a “sign” (אות) between Yahweh and the people, presumably a sign of the Sinaitic covenant.²³ These passages, by literary proximity and language, connect the Sabbath concept, the Tabernacle, and the Sinaitic covenant, and likely inform the relationship that T1 presumes in 56:3-4 and in 58:1-59:8.

Notably, there are also vital links between these concepts and the creation account in Genesis 1:1-2:3. The creation account, of course, provides an etiology for the Sabbath (2:2-3; cf. Exod 20:8-11; 23:12; 31:12-17) and it is on the seventh day that Moses is taken up in a cloud to receive Yahweh’s instructions about the Tabernacle (Exod 24:16). The construction of the Tabernacle, particularly as summarized in Exodus 39:1-40:33, is typologically similar to the creation account. In each, God commands the work, inspects and approves it, and blesses and sanctifies it.²⁴ These close links may account for the use of tent imagery for the creation of the cosmos and Jerusalem in DI (40:22; 54:2). In T1, observance of the Sabbath, especially its ethical dimensions, are critical prerequisites to participating in the temple-covenant community and introduce and lay a foundation for the re-creation of Jerusalem. T1, therefore, reflects and promotes the nexus of all these concepts and uniquely applies them to post-exilic Judean society.

22 Levenson, “Temple and World,” 292-293.

23 Levenson, “Temple and World,” 293.

24 Moshe Weinfeld, “Sabbath, Temple, and the Enthronement of the Lord – The Problem of the Sitz im Leben of Genesis 1:1-2:3,” in *Mélanges bibliques et orientaux en l’honneur de M. Henri Cazelles*, edited by André Caquot and Mathias Delcor (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1981), 503. See also Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, “Cosmos, Temple, House: Building and Wisdom in Ancient Mesopotamia and Israel,” in *From the Foundations to the Crenellations: Essays on Temple Building in the Ancient Near East and Hebrew Bible*, eds. Mark J. Boda and Jamie Novotny (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2010), 399-421, who highlights a co-occurring motif of “filling” (מלא) the cosmos or the temple, especially with the divine “glory” (כבוד) or knowledge of it. For the tabernacle, see Exod 40:34-35. For the temple, see 1 Kgs 8:11; Ezek 10:4; 43:5; 44:4; Hag 2:7; 2 Chron 5:14; 7:1-2. For the earth, see Num 14:21; Isa 6:3; Hab 2:14; Ps 72:19.

Re-Creation and Rebirth

In DI, the language of creation is often deployed as a metaphor for Yahweh's redemptive plan or acts.²⁵ DI works from the general affirmation that Yahweh is the creator of the cosmos and everything in it (40:12-31; 42:5; 44:24; 45:7, 12, 18; 48:13; 51:13) to the particular assertions that Yahweh is the creator of salvation (41:20; 45:8; 48:7), Israel (43:1, 7, 15; 44:2, 24), and Jerusalem (54:5). The declaration that Yahweh is the creator of Jerusalem is arguably the culmination of the creation motif in DI as it fulfills the promise of consolation (40:2). TI builds on this declaration and even more clearly establishes the divine foundations of Jerusalem in at least three ways.

First, TI consecrates and glorifies Jerusalem by unequivocally prescribing her identity as the deity's city. Aside from the celebration of the city by Yahweh and earthly dignitaries in Isaiah 60, Biddle insightfully illuminates TI's use of "mural crown" imagery to this end.²⁶ Likely informed by DI's close association of jewelry and Jerusalem's walls in Isaiah 49:14-18 and 54:11-13, TI declares of Zion, "you will be a beautiful crown in Yahweh's hand and a royal diadem in the palm of your god" (62:3). This metaphor has antecedents in mural crowns depicted or described in Hittite and Mesopotamian glyptic art and literature.²⁷ Mural crowns symbolize and connect divine and royal authority with city battlements and walls, and also evoke the cosmic circle encompassing the heavens and the earth.²⁸ In TI, the metaphor graphically confirms the epithet of Isaiah 60:14: "the city of Yahweh, Zion of the Holy One of Israel" (עיר יהוה ציון קדוש (ישראל)). The epithet and the metaphor set Jerusalem apart as a sacred city at the intersection of divine-human affairs.

Second, TI develops the portrait of Yahweh as creator of Jerusalem by presenting the city's reconstruction as an act of creation or re-creation:

25 On the interrelationship of creation and redemption in DI, see Philip Harner, "Creation Faith in Deutero-Isaiah," *Vetus Testamentum* 17 (1967): 298-305; Carol Stuhlmueller, *Creative Redemption in Deutero-Isaiah* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1970); Gerhard Von Rad, "The Theological Problem of the Old Testament Doctrine of Creation," in *Creation in the Old Testament*, ed. Bernhard W. Anderson (London: SPCK, 1984), 53-64; Richard J. Clifford, "The Unity of the Book of Isaiah and its Cosmogonic Language," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 55 (1993): 1-17; Stephen Lee, *Creation and Redemption in Isaiah 40-55* (Hong Kong: Alliance Baptist Seminary, 1995).

26 Biddle, "Lady Jerusalem."

27 Biddle, "Lady Jerusalem," 178-179.

28 Biddle, "Lady Jerusalem," 177-179. The cosmic circle is attested in Isaiah 40:22 (see, also, Job 22:14; 26:10; Prov 8:27).

For, look, I am creating (כִּי־הֵנֵנִי בּוֹרֵא) a new heavens and a new earth,
 The former things will not be remembered nor trouble the heart,
 Rather celebrate and take unending joy (כִּי־אֶשְׂשִׁיׁוּ וְגִילׁוּ עַד־עַד) in what
 I am creating (בּוֹרֵא),
 For, look, I am creating (כִּי הֵנֵנִי בּוֹרֵא) Jerusalem for joy (גִּילָה) and her people
 for celebration (מְשׁוֹשׁ).

The context, interjections, and imperatives of this passage point to present continuous action; creation is Yahweh's intervention to bring about the promises of 65:13-16. The parallel constructions centering on בָּרָא ("create") provide clear definition to the scope and referent intended by "new heavens and new earth." As often the case in D1, this is not original or eschatological creation but creation deployed as a metaphor. The new heavens and new earth are Jerusalem and her people.

Third, T1 connects this theme of creation to maternal imagery, emphatically reversing the plight of the abandoned, forsaken, and barren Zion of D1, where in D1 such reversals are only anticipated:

No longer will it be said of you, "Forsaken," nor of your land will it be said
 "Desolation";
 for you will be called "My delight is in her," and your land, "Married";
 for Yahweh delights in you, and your land will be married.
 For as a young man marries a young woman, so your builder will marry
 you,²⁹

29 The image of incestuous marriage suggested by the MT reading, "your sons (בְּנֵיךָ) will marry you," has led commentators and versions to read בְּנֵיךָ ("your builder"), following Robert Lowth, *Isaiah: A New Translation* (10th ed.; Dublin: T.T. & J. Tegg, 1833), 118, and assuming Yahweh as Zion's fiancé and builder (see, e.g., Ps 147:2). Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah* 56-66, 233, notes that this reading is not supported by ancient versions and therefore he prefers the MT, providing a plausible rationale for it, namely the play on the double meaning of בָּעַל, "to marry" and "to possess," i.e., the marital image is subtly shifted to make a statement regarding inheritance and tenure. This rationale is not without its merits as tenure is a concern in the broader context of T1; but, the immediate context does not support it. Even though the MT reading is already reflected in the proto-masoretic and Greek traditions, it is difficult to escape the logic of the emendation in light of the parallel image in the second half of the verse where "your god" is parallel to "bridegroom." Indeed, the immediate context, including the processional imagery in 62:10-12, coupled with the later images of birthing and child-rearing in 66:7-12, points to hierogamy as the appropriate and original symbolism. It seems likely that the MT reading arose, early on, out of a pious desire to suppress this explicit statement of hierogamy.

and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so will your god rejoice over you.

...

... you will be called, "Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken."

...

Before she starts labor, she gives birth;

before her contractions start, she delivers a son.

Who has heard of such a thing? Who has seen such things?

Can a land be born in a day? Can a nation be delivered in a moment?

Yet as soon as Zion was in labor, she delivered her children.

...

Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her;

Celebrate with her, enthusiastically, all you who mourn over her

that you may nurse and be satisfied from her comforting breast;

that you may suck and take delight from her overwhelming abundance.

For so says Yahweh:

I will extend prosperity to her like a river, and the wealth of the nations
like an overflowing stream;

and you will nurse and be carried on her hip, and play on her knees.

(62:4-5, 12b; 66:7-8, 10-12; cf., e.g., 49:14-23; 51:3, 17-20; 52:1-12; 54)

In these passages, Zion is wedded to Yahweh and gives birth to a nation. Embedded in this is a claim to political, spiritual, and economic centrality and pre-eminence, and a privileged relationship with Yahweh.

The Statement of Claim

For interpreters such as Hanson and Blenkinsopp, the theological foundations of the city, the uncompromising ethics for the inheriting community, and the homology and metaphor of re-creation and rebirth in TI reflect a deferment of reconstruction and restoration to the eschaton, for a community of the text faced with ostracism and disillusioned by unrealized divine intervention. This thesis rests heavily on Isaiah 65:13-16 and 66:5 as evidence of a schism leading to ostracism. Yet these passages simply cannot carry this weight.

Contrary to Blenkinsopp's argument, the supposed "excommunication" in Isaiah 66:5 is not about access to the temple in Jerusalem, nor is it an enduring condition.³⁰ In order to sustain this interpretation, Blenkinsopp necessarily

30 TI simply does not provide enough information to evaluate the nature of the "excommunication" or persecution. It could relate to the land tenure crisis hinted at throughout the

reads Isaiah 66:6 as eschatological in nature, but then is faced with the abrupt transition from “excommunication” in v. 5 to rejoicing in vv. 7-11, which he unsatisfactorily explains as thematic, reflecting “the close association between the new Zion and the new people.”³¹ The problems with this interpretation are that vv. 1-5 are not primarily about the “new people” but rather about the unfaithful “brethren” who will receive their comeuppance, and vv. 7-11 are not anticipatory but rather invite the audience of the text to behold the miracle transpiring before them.³² As such, v. 6 must allude to an event perceived by T1

book or exclusion from a political or cultic assembly, event, or synod, or perhaps even refers to exclusion or lack of support in exile.

31 Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66*, 301, and cf. 304.

32 On the opponents of T1, I agree with Jill Middlemas, “Divine Reversal and the Role of the Temple in Trito-Isaiah,” in *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, ed. John Day (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 182, who argues that T1 lacks evidence for “a clearly defined division in the community along the lines of different ideological perspectives at the time of its composition.” I am especially skeptical of the assertion that T1 reflects a marginalized or sectarian group in conflict with a “Jerusalem establishment,” see, e.g., Rofé, “Isaiah 66:1-4”; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66*. As even Rofé points out, the “opponents” in T1 are consistently condemned for their neglect of Jerusalem and its temple. Consequently, if the term “establishment” is useful at all to describe opponents of T1, it is much more likely an establishment with Benjaminite, Samaritan, rural, and/or other affiliations. Still, even this assertion is speculative as there is no compelling evidence of a single group or party under attack. T1 simply expresses dissatisfaction with an agglomeration of political, socio-economic, and cultic ills. It is not even clear where the illicit activities are taking place. The cultic offenses take place in unspecified locales (57:3-13; 65:1-7): valleys, rock cliffs, trees, gardens, tombs, mountains, and hills. Some of the commercial and legal activities presume an urban center, but which one or is it even only one? Jerusalem is not identified as the setting and, in fact, if T1 is dated to the early Persian period, Jerusalem is not particularly likely given its condition, see Kenneth A. Ristau, *Reconstructing Jerusalem: Persian-Period Prophetic Perspectives* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2016), esp. 13-88. Ramat Rahel, Mizpah, Samaria, Lachish, or diasporic communities in Āl-Yāhūdu, Bīt-Našar, and Bīt-Abi-rām are more likely to have had the level of activity presupposed by the condemnations as well as a population guilty of neglecting Jerusalem and its temple. Hanson, *Dawn of Apocalyptic*, and Steven S. Tuell, “The Priesthood of the ‘Foreigner’: Evidence of Competing Polities in Ezekiel 44:1-14 and Isaiah 56:1-8,” in *Constituting the Community: Studies on the Polity of Ancient Israel in Honor of S. Dean McBride, Jr.*, eds. John T. Strong and Steven S. Tuell (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 183-204, suggest the competing groups are Levites and Zadokites; Rofé, “Isaiah 66:1-4,” and Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66*, pietists and priests; Morton Smith, *Palestinian Parties and Politics that Shaped the Old Testament* (2d ed.; London: SCM, 1987), and Schramm, *Opponents, monotheists and syncretists*; Seizo Sekine, *Die Tritojesajanische Sammlung (Jes 56-66) redaktionsgeschichtlich untersucht* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989), and Klaus Koenen, *Ethik und*

as dealing the anticipated comeuppance to the enemies of Yahweh and leading to the rebirth of Israel.

A clue as to the nature of the event is provided in Isaiah 66:1. This verse is generally taken as a negative statement about the temple. Yet the verse evokes a sentiment expressed in the Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7:5-7) and at the dedication of the first temple (1 Kgs 8:27-53), namely that Yahweh has no need of a temple and cannot be contained by one. The sentiment is likely expressed to avoid the hubris or arrogance inherent in building a house for a deity; it has a sort of apotropaic function.³³ This correspondence with texts related to the first temple invites the reader to expect the reconstruction of the temple so consistently anticipated throughout D1 and T1, rather than anti-temple rhetoric.³⁴

Eschatologie in Tritojesajabuch (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1990), inclusivists and exclusivists. The fact that scholars have been able to fit the data to support such varied proposals is evidence for the lack of clear definition in T1; tensions certainly existed but the argument for organized groups is weak. Millenarian and apocalyptic groups are unconvincing and anachronistic on genre considerations alone, see John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (2nd rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 23-25. By this, I do not mean to suggest there were no vigorous debates or conflicts, even ostracism of certain individuals or families, in the ebb and flow of Judean politics, only that there is no evidence for the crystallization of cohesive parties. To be sure, the *gôlâ* clearly make up part of T1's community and may have generated tensions. The *gôlâ*, however, may not have been a homogenous group so that the *gôlâ*, or sons of the *gôlâ* (בני הגולה), found, e.g., in Ezra-Nehemiah is only one expression of many. Certainly, neither D1 nor T1 expresses any knowledge of a group or party identified as such. On contemporary Yahwistic practices in the sixth century, see Susan Ackerman, *Under Every Green Tree: Popular Religion in Sixth-Century Judah* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987).

33 Levenson, "Temple and World," 296; *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, 88, argues that it reflects the bi-directionality of the sacred space and cosmos homology, where the cosmos, in this case, is depicted as sacred space.

34 Solomon's prayer reverberates even more broadly in T1, reinforcing the likelihood that 66:1 is pro-temple rhetoric. In particular, Isaiah 56:6-7 promises to foreigners (בני הנכר), who love the name of Yahweh (שם יהוה), a place to rejoice in the house of prayer (בית תפלה), just as 1 Kings 8:41-43 implores Yahweh to listen to the foreigner (הנכרי) who, hearing of the name (שם) of Yahweh, comes and prays (התפלל) in the temple (הבית); cf. 1 Chronicles 17:4-6; 28:2-8, 2 Chronicles 2:6, and 6:18-41. These similarities are not simply verbal links but rather reflect shared theological convictions evolving out of the internationalization of Yahwism. Adapting the Akkadian name-placing formula, *šuma šakānu*, the tradents of Hebrew name theology, such as T1, developed new ways to speak about and conceptualize the divine, creating, or at least privileging, ideas about hypostasis, transcendence, and universalism. On this, see Sandra L. Richter, *The Deuteronomistic*

To be sure, the verse also implies a question shared by those parallel texts, that is, who may build the house (2 Sam 7:5; 1 Kgs 8:7-19). TI argues in 66:3-4 that the temple cannot be built by people who would defile it with profane practices, regardless of their apparent interest in doing so. It can only be built by the “humble and contrite in spirit, who trembles at my word” (v. 5). The logic of v. 6 is, in light of all this, unavoidable. The “tremblers” are, in fact, the temple builders; quite literally, the noise from the city – Yahweh’s retribution against those that have neglected and profaned the cult – is the reconstruction of the temple.³⁵ This victory is the basis for the hope and judgment anticipated in Isaiah 66:7-16. Consequently, in contrast to scholars who read anti-temple rhetoric, v. 1 piously heralds the construction of a house to worship Yahweh, indicated as underway in v. 6.

This solution seems the most probable, especially in light of the progression of the argument in 63:7–64:12, 65:1-7, and 65:8-25. In 63:7–64:12, the community recalls Yahweh’s “gracious deeds” (63:7-9, 10-14) as a preamble to a lament on the crisis of the exile and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple (63:15–64:11), culminating in an appeal to Yahweh to finally act (64:12). In a powerful response, Yahweh claims that he was always ready to act but the nation never truly asked, and even at that, Yahweh still claims to have responded, “Here I

History and the Name Theology: lešakkēn šemô šām in the Bible and the Ancient Near East (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002). Name theology does not preclude or assume divine presence but rather binds Yahweh by covenant and reputation to Jerusalem, its temple, and the community. The name theologians do not reject Yahweh’s presence on earth, in Jerusalem, in the temple or within the community; name theology simply frees Yahweh to be at once a patron deity and at the same time the one and only deity with a general and universal concern for the cosmos and everything in it. In fact, name theology permits greater presence because human culpability only threatens Yahweh’s name or reputation – Yahweh can withdraw the name or be an active agent in its rehabilitation and still remain impeccable – whereas without name theology, human culpability is a direct affront to Yahweh so that holiness demands the withdrawal of presence (where the name could remain). Name theology and monotheism expand the ideological possibilities and necessity for *Bekennntnisgemeinschaft*. The foreigner, without any other legitimate deities to worship, must have access to Yahweh and therefore the opportunity for association by confession. Yahweh, as a universal deity, must accept genuine confession of this sort, and yet must also be able to maintain a particular relationship with Israel. The openness to foreigners, ironically, permits, even invites, a more exclusivist approach to ascriptive membership, requiring that outsiders, and even insiders, meet the standards of confessional membership in order to be a legitimate part of the *Blutgemeinschaft*. TI, therefore, can simultaneously take a more exclusivist approach with respect to ethical responsibilities and cultic practice, and a more inclusivist approach with respect to ethnicity.

35 So, also, Middlemas, “Divine Reversal,” 180-181.

am! Here I am!"³⁶ Yet, the nation refused (65:1-2). Yahweh then catalogues the nation's idolatry and syncretism as evidence justifying Israel's punishment (65:3-7). In Isaiah 65:8-25, the "historical" lesson is related to the present circumstances. Despite a just punishment, T1 indicates that the "servants" were preserved so as not to destroy "the wine found in the cluster" (65:8). Yahweh promises these servants their inheritance and title to the land, the Judean mountains from the Sharon in the northwest and to Achor in the southeast (65:9-10),³⁷ over against those who are alleged to have forsaken Yahweh,

36 The phrase, הִנְנִי הִנְנִי ("Here I am! Here I am!"), echoes the prophetic response in Isaiah 6:8, הִנְנִי (Here I am!). Yahweh takes over the prophetic call. This allusion contributes to an intricate layering of language connecting Isaiah 65-66, Isaiah 57, and Isaiah 6. As Stromberg, *Isaiah After Exile*, 165-168, observes, Isaiah 57:15 and 6:1-2 connect on the divine title, "High and Lofty One" (רם ונשא) and the affirmation of holiness (קדוש) and Isaiah 65-66, 57, and 6 all interrelate on the motif of the "seed" (זרע) with Isaiah 65:9 and 57:13 reflecting a scenario in which the "holy seed" (זרע קדש in 6:13bβ), "seed from Jacob" (מִיעֶקֶב זרע) in 65:9), seed blessed of Yahweh (זרע ברוכי יהוה in 6:19; זרע ברוכי יהוה in 65:23) "inherit" (ירש) and "possess" (נחל) the holy mountain. By contrast, the seed of the adulterer (מנאף), the unfaithful one (תזנה), and deceit (שקר) in Isaiah 57:3-4 sacrifice on a high and lofty mountain (הר־גִּבְהָה ונשא). Isaiah 65 clearly connects the current and former generations and condemns their cultic practices (see Ackerman, *Under Every Green Tree*, 165-212; Schramm, *Opponents*) and presents the "holy seed" or "new wine in the cluster" (התירוש) in 65:8) as the new creation in Jerusalem (65:17-19). In essence, T1 is asserting that the people are engaged in the very same activities that led to the destruction of Jerusalem and Judah. Although seemingly weighted towards condemnation, there is a clear offering of hope and a theology of restoration in T1, which may not have been original to D1.

37 The reference to the Sharon plain is surprising as it is located in the northwest and, in the Persian period, was controlled by the king of Sidon (KAI 2:19-23; COS 2.57). Knoppers, "Israel in Trito-Isaiah," 162-163, suggests that the Sharon is a northern reference point, parallel to Jacob in v. 9, while the Achor Valley is a southern reference point, parallel to Judah in v. 9. Knoppers, therefore, understands the references as a geographic merism, encompassing the central hill country and embracing an expansive view of Israel. On the identification of Achor with *El-Buqê'ah*, a valley south of Jericho and conduit to En-Gedi, see Martin Noth, "Das Deutsche Evangelische Institut für Altertumswissenschaft des Heiligen Landes Lehrkursus 1954," *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 71 (1955): 1-59, esp. 42-55; Frank M. Cross and Józef Milik, "Explorations in the Judaeen Buqê'ah," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 142 (1956): 5-17; Zecharia Kallai, *Historical Geography of the Bible: The Tribal Territories of Israel* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1986), 119-121. According to Joshua 15:7, the Achor valley comprised part of Judah's northern border that cut Jerusalem to the south (Josh 15:7). Consequently, the geographical reference points enclose the Ephraimite and Benjaminite hill country, inclusive of Jerusalem but not the Judean hill country south of it. This geographical orientation, therefore, lays claim to a very different patrimony than that traditionally associated with Judah, the traditional

neglected the holy mountain, and, therefore, as this argument goes, have no title to the land (65:11-12).

The literary context suggests that the neglect of the holy mountain in v. 11 refers, at least in part, to a failure or lack of interest in rebuilding the temple; the historical and/or theological context of the passage may relate to disputes over tenure, reflected also in Ezekiel 11:14-21 and 33:23-29, where the rights and title of expatriates to the land are called into question by apparent peers in the land.³⁸ As in Ezekiel, there is vindication for the community of text. Scholars who view Isaiah 65:17-25 in primarily an eschatological or apocalyptic light, because of the idealized vision of cosmological renewal, interpret Isaiah 65:13-25 (like 66:7-11) as an attempt to salvage Yahweh's promises by deferring reconstruction and vindication to the eschaton. Yet, as indicated *supra*, the heightened language in this passage reflects the idiom of ANE building texts. Read as such, Isaiah 65:13-25 serves as an ideal introduction to 66:1-6 and as an ideal introduction to the rebirth of Israel in 66:7-11, if these texts confirm the reconstruction of the temple. The reconstruction of the temple, and so Isaiah 66:1-6, is the powerful and tangible statement of claim against those who neglect the holy mountain.

Conclusions

Homology and metaphors in Isaiah prescribe the identity of Jerusalem as the divine city and help promote its reconstruction and its restoration to a central place in Yahwistic faith. From D1 through T1, this is part of a program that involves the de-legitimatization of Babylon, royal legitimation, and sophisticated mythopoeia, using ANE tropes and idiom, to promote the city and the theology of the scribe. Commenting on this program and its exuberant rhetoric of creation, Levenson notes its ideological necessity in light of the reality faced by the authors and their community:

Israelite patrimony "from Dan to Beersheba" (Judg 20:1; 1 Kgs 4:25), or the Davidic kingdom of 2 Samuel 8.

- 38 There is no compelling reason to accept that T1 is in conflict with Ezekielian or priestly tradents. in agreement with Schramm, *Opponents*; Rofé, "Isaiah 66:1-4"; contra Hanson, *Dawn of Apocalyptic*. Certainly, there is differing emphasis and considerable room for theological disagreement but this much can be made of differences between D1 and T1 and yet T1 is a tradent of the former. As Schramm, *Opponents*, 110-111, observes, the practices of T1's opponents, even assuming that T1 is engaged in hyperbole, would be as offensive to Ezekielian or priestly tradents as to T1.

The re-creation of the temple-city could only have been conceived as a reenthronement of YHWH after a long period in which his palace lay in ruins, and his faithful subjects seemed abandoned and helpless. The reconstruction of the temple-city was not only the recovery of national honor, but also a renewal of the cosmos, of which the temple was a miniature. It is for this reason that YHWH is here said not to build Jerusalem, but to create it (*bōrē*, v. 18) just as he creates (*bōrē*, v. 17) the new heaven and the new earth.³⁹

This Isaianic program clearly recognizes and responds to the destitution of the early Persian period, depicting Jerusalem, first, as an abandoned mother and focusing divine concern on the breached walls and absence of houses and then, especially in TI, transformed, as a bride, mural crown, and new mother.

Clearly inspired by DI, TI visualizes Jerusalem's reconstruction as the re-creation of a divine city for a new *Bekenntnisgemeinschaft* ("confessional community"). TI is certainly concerned with the physical reconstruction of Jerusalem but the real innovation in its rhetoric, certainly vis-à-vis Mesopotamian and West Semitic parallels, is the malleability of the city, as both a physical site, even a physical site personified or deified, and a community. The re-creation of Jerusalem, while concerned with its physical reconstruction, is ultimately about the creation or re-creation of a new people from a scattered and beleaguered remnant. A community is born through the reconstruction of the temple and the city.⁴⁰

Emphasizing belief and praxis over birth, TI envisions a community with particular convictions: embracing the name of Yahweh, revering and upholding the Sabbath, showing solidarity with the marginalized, and manifesting concern for Jerusalem. Their primogenitors are the mourners (57:18; 61:2-3; 66:10), the watchers on the wall (62:6), the preserved cluster (65:8), those who tremble at the word of Yahweh (66:2, 5), and the servants of Yahweh (54:17; 56:6; 63:17; 65:8-9, 13-15; 66:14). Their inheritance is Jerusalem and the hill country from the Sharon to the Achor (65:10).

One of DI and TI's critical contributions to their community, then, is a text that promulgates a theological justification for Jerusalem and its reconstruction, perhaps specifically vis-à-vis the Torah, which is silent on this subject.⁴¹

39 Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, 89-90.

40 So also Berges, "Gottesgarten und Tempel"; "Himmel und Erde."

41 As I argue in *Reconstructing Jerusalem*, 114-115, "the language and theology of TI seems to align the tradents with the Holiness (H) tradition" while also showing affinities to or awareness of the Deuteronomic and Yahwist traditions, and so suggesting that "DI and TI

Contrary to many traditional interpretations, the community of this text is clearly not a group at odds with an existing establishment in Jerusalem. Rather, D1 and T1 envision the creation of a new establishment in Jerusalem as a solution to the decentering effect of destruction and exile. In this regard, it is important not to allow diachronic realities to isolate D1 and T1 from one another. Though T1 is clearly more concerned with the nature of post-exilic Yahwistic faith and, therefore, starker in its judgments, T1 probably did not circulate independently and is inextricably bound to D1 and its visions. Indeed, D1 and T1 present a largely complementary view that those who follow Yahweh's call are a light and signal, emanating from Jerusalem and reaching out to the rest of Israel and the nations.⁴² Together with other Persian-period authors and tradents, these Isaianic tradents laid a foundation for Jerusalem as a territorial anchor for national *and* trans-national manifestations of Yahwism.⁴³

are aware of a Torah already in the late sixth century and that they are influenced by the many traditions of that work."

42 As argued by Knoppers ("Did Jacob Become Judah?"; "Israel in Trito-Isaiah"), there is insufficient evidence in D1 and T1 to conclude that the community of this text, while concerned with Jerusalem's centrality, narrowed its concept of Israel to Judah, the *gôlâ*, or a sectarian identity. Rather their concern for Jerusalem reflects a theological commitment that the rebirth of Israel can only occur through the reconstruction of the city and temple. The condemnation of an agglomeration of political, socio-economic, and cultic ills in T1 has led scholars to posit a dramatic and diverse field of potential opposition parties. Given that many of the suggestions have merits, the results of this research, taken together, may suggest that no particular group is intended (see n. 32 *supra*). The rhetoric of destruction and judgment functions as a more general warning about the fate of the wicked. Ultimately, the dominant vision is the redemption and ingathering of "all flesh" (66:18-23) with the primary means to this end presented as the reconstruction and restoration of Jerusalem to be Israel's progenetrix.

43 Ristau, *Reconstructing Jerusalem*. On the national and international dimensions of Yahwism, see Gary N. Knoppers "Ethnicity, Genealogy, Geography, and Change: The Judean Communities of Babylon and Jerusalem in the Story of Ezra," in *Community Identity in Judean Historiography: Biblical and Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Gary N. Knoppers and Kenneth A. Ristau (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 147-171; "Exile, Return and Diaspora: Expatriates and Repatriates in Late Biblical Literature," in *Texts, Contexts and Readings in Postexilic Literature: Explorations into Historiography and Identity Negotiation in Hebrew Bible and Related Texts*, ed. Louis Jonker (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 29-61.

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PART 3

Religion



The Bible and Literature (in Secret): A Religious Reading

Peter J. Sabo

(1) *Tolle, lege! Tolle, lege!*

(2) In June 1921 Kafka wrote a letter to his friend Robert Klopstock mocking the story of Abraham binding Isaac in Genesis 22.¹ “It’s an old story,” writes Kafka, “not worth discussing anymore.”² One is almost persuaded to heed to his advice (given, among other reasons, the libraries that have already been written about it) were it not for the fact that Kafka does not follow it himself. That is, the quote above comes in the midst of a discussion about the biblical story, one in which Kafka playfully imagines many Abrahams (none of them especially endearing) and thereby piques even more interest in the tale. He imagines a patriarch who was never able to satisfy the demand for a sacrifice because he was so preoccupied with mundane household tasks; another Abraham is imagined not to have believed in the call at all – not because he lacked faith, but because he could not believe somebody so unworthy, so old and ugly as himself, would have been asked. In these musings, Kafka not only re-reads the biblical text, but also the readings of others, most notably Kierkegaard. For in regard to the “real Abraham” Kafka asserts, “he had everything to start with ... I can’t see the leap.”³ Moreover, when he playfully suggests that Abraham had a house with rafters where he was able to hide his knife, he seems to be ridiculing Kierkegaard’s adamant stance in *Fear and Trembling* that Abraham was able to hide from Isaac, and everyone else, his sacrificial intentions.

This essay too is preoccupied with re-reading and re-imagining the Abraham story, particularly how it relates to “religion” and to “literature,” which, like Abraham, are old terms, perhaps not worth discussing anymore (though much hinges on this *perhaps*). Like Kafka, I cannot but read the biblical story through the lens of precursors; in this case the guiding work is Jacques Derrida’s “Literature in Secret: An Impossible Filiation” (*La littérature au secret: Une*

1 To Francis, my *Doktorvater*, and to the bond between us.

2 Franz Kafka, *Paradoxes and Parables*, ed. Nahum H. Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), 43.

3 Kafka, *Paradoxes and Parables*, 43.

filiation impossible), a text that finds the beginning, or at least beginning in the sense of possibility, of both “literature” and “religion” in the story of Abraham’s (near) sacrifice of Isaac. What follows below will be part exegesis, part commentary, part exploration of “Literature in Secret” and the arguments and themes found in it. My reading will be a “religious” one, that is, with an eye to “religion” (to the “Abrahamic religions”⁴), but also in the sense of scrupulous, conscientiously repetitive. Moreover, I have structured my reading (somewhat arbitrarily) around the etymology of the term “religion” (from the Latin *religio*). If Derrida finds the beginning of religion (and literature) in the Abrahamic moment, then why not go back to the origin of the word too? I do this knowing that etymology does not provide a law, an eternal meaning, but only material for further scrutiny and study. To go back, to reconsider and re-read, is a very religious thing to do.

(3) “*And what if religio remained untranslatable? No religio without sacramentum, without alliance and promise of testifying truth, which is to say, to speak the truth: that is to say, to begin with, no religion without the promise of keeping one’s promise to tell the truth – and to have already told it! – in the very act of promising. To have already told it, veritas, in Latin, and thus consider it told. The event to come has already taken place. The promise promises itself, it is already promised, that is the sworn faith, the given word, and hence the response. Religio would begin there.*”⁵

4 The phrase “Abrahamic religions” is a term from Islamic discourse, which is somewhat ironic given that the reading below (like that of Derrida’s and Kierkegaard’s) focuses almost solely on the story of Abraham and Isaac from the Hebrew Bible. The Abrahamic is always fragmentary – or, as Gil Anidjar puts it, the Abrahamic “oscillates between the haunting threat of a volcanic explosion, the no less ‘seismic’ turbulence of aftershocks ... and the promise of peaceful reconciliation, all of which may yet have to be distinguished” (“Introduction: ‘Once More: Once More,’” in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar [New York: Routledge, 2002], 1-39 [5]). Thus, the phrase emphasizes *différance* perhaps more than it does unity and sameness, for there are always many and multiple Abrahams. (On the uniqueness of Abraham in each separate “religious” tradition, and on the troublesome aspects of aligning these “religious” traditions under the same name of Abraham, see Aaron Hughes, *Abrahamic Religions: On the Uses and Abuses of History* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2012].)

5 Jacques Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of ‘Religion’ at the Limits of Reason Alone,” in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar, trans. Samuel Weber (New York: Routledge, 2002), 40-101 (67).

(4) After beginning “Literature in Secret” with a short rumination on an enigmatic phrase, *Pardon de ne pas vouloir dire* (which will be discussed below), Derrida offers his reader a startling assertion:

Among all those, infinite in number throughout history, who have kept an absolute secret, a terrible secret, an infinite secret, I think of Abraham, starting point (*l'origine*) for all the Abrahamic religions, but also the origin (*l'origine*) of this fund without which what we call literature would probably never have managed to emerge as such and under that name. Does the secret of some elective affinity therefore ally the secret of the elective Covenant between God and Abraham with the secret of what we call literature, the secret *of* literature and secrecy *in* literature?⁶

Derrida thus finds a parallel between Abraham's ability to keep an absolute secret – that is, the patriarch's commitment to an absolutely singular other – and the operation of the literary work in the experience of the reader. But as the quote above displays, the biblical text is not just an analogy; rather, as Derrida asserts, it is the “the origin” (*l'origine*) of “what we call literature” (in the same way as it is “the origin” [*l'origine*] of Abrahamic religions).

(5) In the beginning, therefore, is the secret.

After these things, God tested Abraham, and said to him, “Abraham.” And he said, “Here I am” (Gen 22:1).

“The request for secrecy,” asserts Derrida, “begins in this instant.”⁷ It is the instant when the other calls and you respond. And in responding, you show your responsibility to the other, to the other alone, “tête-à-tête, without a third party.”⁸ In essence, Abraham and God say “*salut*” to each other, the *salut* of unconditional welcoming.⁹ To greet, to confront and address the “other,” represents the barest foundation of the social bond, but without it there could be no “religion” and no “literature.” There is already a certain faith in this greeting, for

6 Jacques Derrida, “Literature in Secret,” in *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 117–58 (121); *Donner la mort* (Paris: Galilée, 1991), 163.

7 Derrida, “Literature in Secret,” 122.

8 Derrida, “Literature in Secret,” 122.

9 For a discussion of Derrida's many uses of *salut*, see Michael Naas, *Miracle and Machine: Jacques Derrida and the Two Sources of Religion, Science, and the Media* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 50–55.

Abraham does not yet know what God is going to say/ask (and he does not know that he is being tested), but he responds and thereby gives credit to God's *salut*.¹⁰ It reveals an "elective affinity" between the two, even the "secret of an elective Covenant between God and Abraham." It is a covenant which consists of "respecting the absolute singularity, the infinite separation of what binds me or exposes me to the unique, to one as the other, to *the One as to the Other*."¹¹ In other words, from the very beginning of the story, there is already binding taking place.

And [God] said: "Take your son, your only one, the one whom you love, Isaac, and go forth to the land of Moriah. And offer him up there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you" (Gen 22:2).

There are, according to Derrida, two secrets assigned to Abraham in this verse. The first is that Abraham must not reveal to anyone that God has called him and asked the greatest sacrifice of him. This is the secret that is the focus of Kierkegaard's interest, the one that Abraham does not share – thus the focus on the patriarch's silence.¹² Even when Abraham speaks, as in his dialogue with Isaac in vv.7-8, he keeps this secret; he speaks in order to say nothing essential about this secret.

Derrida, however, points out that there is also a second secret, a "super-secret," one that is distinct from, but also related to, this first secret – namely, "the reason for or sense of the sacrificial demand."¹³ This is the secret that already begins from the moment God and Abraham say *salut* to each other. Abraham does not know this secret, because this "secret does not have the sense of something to hide as Kierkegaard suggests ... It is a secret without

10 In *The Gift of Death*, Derrida writes the following of Abraham's "Here I am": "'Here I am': the first and only possible response to the call by the other, the originary moment of responsibility such as it exposes me to the singular other, the one who appeals to me. 'Here I am' is the only self-presentation presumed by every form of responsibility: I am ready to respond, I reply that I am ready to respond." (72)

11 Derrida, "Literature in Secret," 122.

12 "They rode in silence for three days; on the morning of the fourth Abraham still said not a word ... Silently he arranged the firewood, bound Isaac; silently he drew the knife." Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Alastair Hannay (New York: Penguin, 2005), 9 and 11.

13 Derrida, "Literature in Secret," 129.

content, without any sense to be hidden.”¹⁴ So Abraham is bound to secrecy, he keeps this secret, “quite simply because the secret remains secret to him.”¹⁵

Literature too is held to this secrecy – hence the title *La littérature au secret*, which, as Derek Attridge notes, means “literature locked up, incommunicado,” referring to the inability to communicate.¹⁶ There is no literature without secrecy, and no secrecy without (the possibility of) literature.

(6) The *Akedah*, “The Binding.” It is a story common to the “people of the book,” to those who believe in the bindings of sacred texts.¹⁷ But behind this shared bond one must remember that the Abrahamic is always split and multifarious (and multifarious in the etymological sense as well: multiple divine laws). For instance, only one of the Abrahamic religions – the one that does not bind its sacred texts in books – names this story the *Akedah*. Only Judaism offers a summary name that directs one’s attention not to the initial call, not to the moment of (near) sacrifice and the ram’s substitution, but to this moment of binding (Gen 22:9). It occurs in the midst of a rapid series of verbs that highlight Abraham’s methodical process: he builds an altar, lays his wood in order, binds Isaac, and lays his son on the altar. There is a sense of order and organization to Abraham’s mad actions, as if the only thing keeping him going is the process itself. To bind, moreover, always requires a repetitive sequence, one must loop over and tie back.

Perhaps we might play with this moment’s connection to the etymological explanation of “religion” (*religio*) from *religare*, which means “to tie back” or more simply “to bind.”¹⁸ For beyond Abraham’s physical binding of Isaac to the

¹⁴ Derrida, “Literature in Secret,” 154.

¹⁵ Derrida, “Literature in Secret,” 129. In the final pages of the third chapter of *The Gift of Death* Derrida offers a direct answer concerning what he believes it means to share a secret: “To share a secret is not to know or to reveal the secret, it is to share we know not what: nothing that can be known, nothing that can be determined. What is a secret that is a secret about nothing and a sharing that doesn’t share anything?” (80)

¹⁶ Derek Attridge, *Reading and Responsibility* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 50, n.16. The French *en secret* would have been more natural for “in secret”; however, the translator David Wills is still right to have “Literature in Secret,” since it keeps “secret” in the title.

¹⁷ See, for example, Edward Kessler, *Bound by the Bible: Jews, Christians, and the Sacrifice of Isaac* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹⁸ Mark C. Taylor, ed., *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 8. This connection between the Akedah and the etymology of religion was first brought to my attention from a brief footnote in Inge-Birgitte Siegmundfeldt’s essay, “Secrets and Sacrifices of Scission”: “The traditional Jewish term for what Christian traditions term the ‘sacrifice’ of Isaac is *Akedat Yitshak*, ‘the binding of Isaac.’ Relatedly,

altar, there are all types of bonds and binding in this story to consider. There is, for example, Kierkegaard's famous distinction between the ethical and the religious, which contrasts two separate bindings. The highest expression of the ethical is what binds us to our own fellows (to our family, community, and nation). From this standpoint, Abraham's relation to Isaac "is quite simply this, that the father should love the son more than himself."¹⁹ By binding Isaac to the altar, by performing the *Akedat Yitshak*, Abraham betrays this ethical bond to his son (and to his wife and others as well). But this is because Abraham is bound to another: God. This is the "religious" bond: "[T]here is an absolute duty to God; for in this tie of obligation the individual relates himself absolutely, as the single individual, to the absolute."²⁰ Augustine, and the etymological strand behind religion that relates the term to binding, would agree: "Let our religion bind us to the one omnipotent God, because no creature comes between our minds and him whom he know to be Father and the Truth."²¹

The line between these two binds, however, is not so easily distinguishable (just as it can be difficult to discern between the noun and the verb of "bind"). The great tension of Genesis 22 is that Isaac is the son of promise, the one through whom God promised to establish his covenant (see Gen 17:19, 21:2). To sacrifice Isaac, therefore, is to forego the goal to which Isaac's life was dedicated – it is to sacrifice the future: the promise of land, descendants, and blessings – and thus the covenant with God.²² Kierkegaard points out this paradoxical problem: "the terrifying thing in the collision is this – that it is not a collision between God's command and man's command but between God's command and God's command."²³ God is asking Abraham to give up on his

perhaps, Latin *religio* means 'bond,' 'obligation'" (*Derrida and Religion: Other Testaments*, eds. Yvonne Sherwood and Kevin Hart [New York: Routledge, 2005] 293, n.31).

19 Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 66.

20 Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 82.

21 Augustine, *Of True Religion*, trans. H.S. Burleigh (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1964), 106.

22 One is reminded of Maurice Blanchot's question on binding versus unbinding in connection to religion: "If ... religion is etymologically that which binds, that which holds together, then what of the non-bond, which disjoins beyond unity – which escapes the synchrony of 'holding together,' yet does so without breaking all relations or without ceasing, in the break or in this absence of relation, to open yet another relation? Must one be nonreligious for that?" (*The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995], 64).

23 Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, 1-7, eds. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967-78), 1: 908. In his analysis of *tout autre est tout autre* ("every other is wholly other" among the phrases many interpretive

divine promise, to sacrifice his responsibility to his earlier promises. For Derrida, it is equivalent to giving up on the very idea of “sacredness”: “From that moment on there is nothing sacred in the world for Abraham, for he is ready to sacrifice anything. This test would thus be a sort of *desacralization* of the world.”²⁴ The reader, likewise, is asked to contemplate a holy history at odds with itself. Within the “Abrahamic moment” there is the possibility that there would be no “Abrahamic religions”; no Tanakh, Bible, or Qur’an; and even no “religion.”

(7) Literature finds its *origin* in this Abrahamic moment. That is, if it is literature in the sense that Derrida points out in a series of whereas clauses at the end of “Literature in Secret”: if it is that which has the right to say everything (and nothing); if it is exonerated from responsibility, before political or civic law, for its sense and referent; if it does not have to answer or correspond to anything in the “real” world; if it is bound to secrecy – then it relies absolutely on the desacralization of the world, on the willingness or openness to sacrifice everything (even, or especially, the sacred).

It is as if that which counts as literature must constantly be saying *Pardon de ne pas vouloir dire...*, the phrase with which Derrida begins “Literature in Secret.” Translated literally *vouloir dire* means “to want to say,” but is also an idiomatic expression for “to mean” – thus the translation of David Wills “Pardon for not meaning (to say)...,” which attempts to capture both meanings at once.²⁵ The ellipsis suggests that the sentence is incomplete in some way, that something more could be said but is deferred or interrupted. This emphasizes the decontextualized state of the phrase, as if it “simply stays up in the air.”²⁶ One might come across it one day, Derrida speculates, “written on a board, readable on a wall, inscribed in stone, on the surface of a sheet of paper or saved, in reserve, on a computer disk,” and so it would be “at the mercy of every passerby.”²⁷ That the phrase is subject to a public space, and that one cannot

possibilities) in *The Gift of Death*, Derrida points out the impossibility of distinguishing between the “ethical” and the “religious”: “If every human is wholly other, if everyone else, or every other one, is every bit other, then one can no longer distinguish between a claimed generality of ethics that would need to be sacrificed in sacrifice, and the faith that turns toward God alone, as wholly other, turning away from human duties ... Kierkegaard would have to admit, as Lévinas recalls, that ethics is also the order of and respect for absolute singularity, and not only that of generality or repetition of the same.” (84)

24 Derrida, “Literature in Secret,” 154.

25 Derrida, “Literature in Secret,” 119, n.1.

26 Derrida, “Literature in Secret,” 132.

27 Derrida, “Literature in Secret,” 119.

determine its “content, sense, referent, signatory, and addresses”²⁸ – in other words, that there is secrecy to the phrase – already opens it up to becoming literature. Derrida notes that one might also ask whether the phrase is from a prayer, and later he will even call it an “enigmatic prayer.”²⁹ Thus, attention is drawn to the *pardon* – which connects to the gift (*don*), as in the “gift of death” (*donner la mort*) – and displays that the phrase could be a plea for forgiveness. It asks forgiveness for its non-meaning and silence.

Abraham, Derrida surmises, might have uttered this phrase in the moment he committed himself to following God’s command, and also when he responded without responding to Isaac’s question. God too might have uttered the phrase in giving the command, and also when retracting it. Between the bond, the mad love, between Abraham and God, each asks for pardon, for forgiveness (from the other as much as from oneself), for not meaning (to say). This is the Abrahamic origin of literature, what allows for literature’s emergence, and what leads to Derrida’s conclusion:

... literature inherits, certainly, from a holy history of which the Abrahamic moment remains the essential secret (and who will deny that literature remains a religious remainder, a connection and a relay of sacrosanctity in a society without God?), but it also denies that history, that belonging, that heritage. It denies that filiation. It betrays it in the double sense of the word: it is unfaithful to it, it breaks with it at in the very moment of manifesting its “truth” and of unveiling its secret. Namely that of its own filiation: possible impossible. This “truth” exists on the condition of a denial whose possibility was already implied in the binding of Isaac.

For this double betrayal literature can only ask for forgiveness. There is no literature that does not, from its very first word, ask for forgiveness. In the beginning, there was forgiveness. For nothing. For meaning (to say) nothing.³⁰

28 Derrida, “Literature in Secret,” 131.

29 Derrida, “Literature in Secret,” 130.

30 Here I use my own translation, and thus will provide the French for the reader: “... la littérature hérite, certes, d’une histoire sainte dont le moment abrahamique reste le secret essentiel (et qui niera que la littérature reste un reste de religion, un lien et un relais de sacro-sainteté dans une société sans Dieu?), mais elle renie aussi cette histoire, cette appartenance, cet héritage. Elle renie cette filiation. Elle la trahit au double sens du mot : elle lui est infidèle, elle rompt avec elle au moment même d’en manifester la « vérité » et d’en dévoiler le secret. À savoir sa propre filiation : possible impossible. Cette « vérité » est à la condition d’un reniement dont la ligature d’Isaac impliquait déjà la possibilité” (Derrida, *Donner la mort*, 208).

So while both literature and religion have the same Abrahamic origin, literature attempts to deny this link. Of course, this very act of betrayal (in the sense of being unfaithful or disloyal) betrays (in the sense of unintentional revelation or uncovering) its affiliation to religion as well. It is an act like Abraham's, absolutely (ir)responsible. And as with Abraham, this double betrayal leads to forgiveness (*pardon*), the need to ask for forgiveness for both obedience and disobedience, that is to say, "For nothing. For meaning (to say) nothing" (*Pour rien. Pour ne rien vouloir dire*).³¹ The focus on literature's "first word" (*premier mot*) and the unmistakable reference to the Bible's first words, "in the beginning" (*au commencement*), points to the timelessness of the Abrahamic moment.³² Derrida often plays with "in the beginning," as in sections/aphorisms 35 and 36 of "Faith and Knowledge," in which he repeats the phrase twice, or in "The Force of Law" in which he writes, "In the beginning there will have been force."³³ In all these cases, the phrase harkens back to beginnings while questioning them at the same time, showing how they are already infused with repetition and iterability (exemplified in the two creation accounts in Genesis, the two beginnings).³⁴ Derrida finds the genesis of literature and religion in the book of Genesis, in the binding of Isaac, but also in the "beginning," in the Bible's beginning, its very first word.

(8) Let us go back to the beginning of "religion," that is, to another etymological explanation for the word. This argument is often traced back to Cicero and asserts that *religio* derives from *relegere* which means "to re-collect" or "re-

31 J. Hillis Miller ponders the ambiguity of the addressee from whom literature asks forgiveness: "The word 'pardon' in the phrase suggests, according to Derrida, that literature, as the betrayal of Scripture, sacred texts, the Bible, must continually, in one way or another, beg pardon (from whom? from God? from constituted authorities? from the reader?) for falsely intimating Scripture, for pretending to be what it is not. Or, on the contrary, literature must beg pardon just because it does, blasphemously, succeed in being Scripture, in hiding secrets just as Scripture does" ("Literature and Scripture: An Impossible Filiation," in *Exit: Endings and New Beginnings in Literature and Life*, ed. Stefan Helgesson [New York: Rodopi, 2011], 203-18 [212]).

32 In *The Gift of Death* Derrida writes: "God stops [Abraham] *at the instant when there is no more time, where time is no more given*, as if Abraham had *already* killed Isaac: the concept of the instant is always indispensable." (73)

33 See Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," 75-6 and "Force of Law," 238.

34 For an extended analysis of the phrase "in the beginning" in "Faith and Knowledge" (in which Derrida is perhaps purposefully playing with the two creation accounts, the two beginnings, in Genesis), see Naas, *Miracle and Machine*, 120-24.

read.”³⁵ The “religious,” from this perspective, are those who carefully review and investigate the traditions of their ancestors. The phrase *religio est*, for instance, means “to have scruples,” an attitude of reflection, one that reconsiders a previous choice. Commenting on the historical use of the word Émile Benveniste concludes: “*religio* is a hesitation that holds back, a scruple that prevents, and not a sentiment that guides an action or incites one to practice a cult.”³⁶ *Religio* is contrasted therefore to *superstitio*, the “superstitious” being those who practice rituals routinely without questioning why. *Superstites*, relatedly, can mean “survivors,” those who were interested in prayer and sacrifice in order to ensure the *survival* of their children.³⁷

Abraham, from this perspective, is both superstitious and religious. Unlike Job, for example, he never questions God’s reasoning and the demand for the sacrifice. He does not hesitate to follow the command, does not display any scruples. On the other hand, his sacrifice is not superstitious in the sense of guaranteeing (familial) survival – it is precisely the opposite. Moreover, Abraham’s sacrifice, as we have noted above, entails being irresponsible to, breaking with, God’s previous commands and promises. The biblical text itself plays with this tension, as the command to “go forth” (לך-לך) to the land of Moriah in 22:2 echoes the command to “go forth” to the land of Canaan in 12:1 (and it is only in these two verses that this phrase ever appears in the Hebrew Bible). The threefold specification (native land, kin-group, and father’s house) of what Abraham was to give up in 12:1 is also reflected in the triad of terms (son, only/favored one, the one whom you love) describing Abraham’s sacrifice in 22:2. But this connection shows circularity as much as it does continuity, for after giving up his father’s house, Abraham must now give up the son on whom he had planned to build his own house. So by repeatedly being “superstitious” and following God’s commands without question, Abraham actually displays his *religio*, his scruples, as well.

35 See Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods*; René Gothóni, “Religio and Superstitio Reconsidered,” *Archiv für Religionspsychologie* 21, no.1 (1994): 37–46; and Sarah F. Hoyt, “The Etymology of Religion,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 32, no.2 (1912): 126–29. Gothóni notes that philologists typically favor Cicero’s etymology, while theologians (he does not mention religion scholars) typically adopt the etymology of Lactantius, Lucretius, and Augustine.

36 Émile Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society*, trans. Elizabeth Palmer (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), 521.

37 See Jeremy M. Schott, *Christianity, Empire, and the Making of Religion in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 105; see also David Berliner and Ramon Sarró, *Learning Religion: Anthropological Studies* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 2–3.

(9) Pause for a moment, an instant, and consider this “strange phenomenon of Latinity and of its globalization.”³⁸ To ponder the root of religion is to partake in the process of what Derrida refers to as *Globalatinization* (*mondialatini-sation*). The neologism is meant to draw attention to the link between religion, Latin, and the process of “becoming-world-wide.”³⁹ Literature too is part of *Globalatinization*, deriving, like religion, from Latin and becoming a global catchword. Both terms have moved far beyond their parochial historical origins and etymologies. Somewhat paradoxically, however, their contagion keeps spreading even as more and more is made of the fact that the terms are not universal, and that there will never be agreement between what is and is not “religion” or “literature.”

This mass mediatization highlights Christianity’s central role in *Globalatinization* as well. Christianity is the religion of news, and thus has a unique relationship with mass communication, broadcasting, and tele-technology. There is no “religion,” no such easily separable and identifiable institution, without Christianity. “Religion” would not have spread as it has; it would not be a topic on talk radio or as a separate section in newspapers and news websites.

How does this “religion” relate to the “religion” found in the Abrahamic moment, which relies absolutely on the secret? Elsewhere, Derrida elaborates upon this (dis)connection, noting that the secret must not become news.

What *must* God have said to Abraham? What did he tell him, necessarily, at the moment when he gave him the order to climb Mount Moriah, accompanied by Isaac and by his donkey, in view of the worst possible sacrifice? What could and should He have told him?... [O]ne can propose, in all certainty, and without knowing anything else, that what He must have told him can be summarized thus: “Above all, no journalists!”⁴⁰

The supreme betrayal of the secret is to introduce a third party, to bring another member into the tête-à-tête covenant. A third party is a mediator, a journalist, who thereby destroys the unconditional privacy of the secret. This betrayal amounts to making the secret into *news* – and news is not literature. News, like literature, exists in the public space, but it has no secret; its goal, in fact, is to

38 Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 66.

39 See Naas, *Miracle and Machine*, 58.

40 Jacques Derrida, “Above All, No Journalists!” in *Religion and Media*, eds. Hent de Vries and Samuel Weber, trans. Samuel Weber (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 56-93 (56).

share the secret, and thereby it exploits mediatization, translation, universalization, and tele-technology. Derrida further translates what “no journalists” means:

God: “So no mediator between us (not even Christ, who will have been the first journalist or news-man [*nouvelliste*], like the Evangelists who bring the Good news), no media between us. No third. The ordeal that binds us must not be newsworthy. This event must not be news: neither good nor bad.”⁴¹

So far then, it seems as if there is no bond between news, and religion and literature (in Derrida’s sense), for if one can know the secret, if the secret can be shared, then it can only be news. This also entails a great divide between Christianity and every other “religion,” even Judaism and

Islam. It is a divide that also relates to Abraham: “I am not certain that the history of Abraham-Ibrahim should be counted as part of ‘religion.’ As soon as I call it a ‘religious phenomenon’ or the ‘founding archive of religion *as such*,’ the moment of Christianization has already begun.”⁴²

At the same time, however, Derrida argues that there is a common source to be found here. Media relies on the barest social bond, the one that begins with the super-secret, the origin of every communication and social bond – the call for belief and credit: “Believe me, I am telling you the truth, believe me!”⁴³ What is effectively being said in this cry for belief is appeal to the experience of the miracle, since one cannot ever know what the other has in his or her head and has to respond anyway. The relationship between media and religion finds its space “in this homogeneity between the ordinary miracle of the ‘believe me’ and the extraordinary miracles revealed by all the Holy Scriptures.”⁴⁴ It is also the common source to literature, for this “believe me” relies on fiction, on the possibility of lying and falsehood, as much as it does on truth and reality. If the other always told the truth, was always a faithful witness, then there would be

41 Derrida, “Above All, No Journalists!” 57. Michael Naas offers further elaboration of the meaning of “no journalists”: “YHWH would have said in effect to Abraham: Do not reveal, do not broadcast or publicize, do not evangelize or proclaim, what has happened between us; do not make our secret into some good news, or put it on the news, and especially do not televise it, or disseminate it via satellite or the Internet, and don’t even dream about putting it on your Face Book page, and as for Twitter, don’t even get me started...” (*Miracle and Machine*, 127).

42 Derrida, “Above All, No Journalists!” 88.

43 Derrida, “Above All, No Journalists!” 64.

44 Derrida, “Above All, No Journalists!” 77.

no need for this call to belief. Literature, in this sense, is “fake news.”⁴⁵ It asks to be believed, to be given credit, despite its fictionality. Again, this is how literature betrays religion, how it reveals its alliance with religion (with “holy history” and sacred scriptures) at the very moment which it seeks to break itself away from it.

(10) This is a (hi)story of fathers and sons – an impossible filiation.⁴⁶ It is a (hi)story of origins, descent, and (shared) inheritance. It is surprising then that Derrida (and Kierkegaard too) largely ignores the role of Isaac. He does not discuss, for instance, the question of how much Isaac knew what Abraham was

45 As I write, the news of the day, the (seemingly) new news, is “fake news.” The accusation of fake news plays to the fear that certain news may not be “real” – that is, that certain news may not be truthful or shared in good faith. But in order for this to have any merit, then the accusation itself must be credited as “real” news. Thus, fake news likewise relies on this bare social bond, on belief and the experience of the miracle. The difference, of course, is that literature and news (whether “fake” or “real”) approach this call for belief from opposite directions. Because of its reliance on fiction and falsehood, literature does not have to answer or correspond to anything in the “real” world. News, on the other hand, relies on the possibility of truth. Accordingly, it is *not* exonerated from responsibility before political or civic law; it does *not* have the right to say everything (or nothing); and it must seek to answer or correspond to things in the “real” world. To admit that both news and literature rely on the secret, therefore, certainly does not amount to an endorsement of the spreading of “alternative facts” and the movement that seems to be progressively eroding trust in the media (as if it is not enough for some to strip literature of its fictionality, news must also be stripped of its truth).

46 To call Genesis 22 a (hi)story of fathers and sons is to go along with the dominant ideology of the Bible, something that the reader, of course, is free to resist. There are other actors to consider in this story, other silences to consider besides those of Abraham, Isaac, and God. There is, most notably, the silence of Sarah who not only says nothing but to whom nothing is said. Derrida wonders what would happen if Sarah (or Hagar, on any other woman) intervened in some way in Genesis 22: “Would the logic of sacrificial responsibility within the implacable universality of the law, of its law, be altered, inflected, attenuated or displaced, if a woman were to intervene in some consequential manner? Does the system of this sacrificial responsibility and of the double “gift of death” imply at its very basis an exclusion or sacrifice of woman?” (*The Gift of Death*, 77). The same could be said of the ram as well, for while human sacrifice is avoided animal sacrifice is not. Thus there is no “sacrifice of sacrifice” in this story, and the animal is the ultimate victim. In *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, Derrida writes: “ask Abraham’s ram or the living beast that Abel offered to God: they know what is about to happen to them when men say ‘Here I am’ to God, then consent to sacrifice themselves, to sacrifice their sacrifice, or to forgive themselves” (ed. Marie Louise Mallet, trans. David Wills [New York: Fordham University Press, 2008], 30).

up to. If Abraham remains “silent” even in his response in Gen. 22.8, then does not Isaac also remain “silent” even in his question in 22.7? For surely at some point Abraham’s intentions were obvious to Isaac and the son became privy to one of the father’s secrets, but just exactly when one cannot say (the march to Moriah? the moment of binding?). Indeed, this is a great difference between the Abraham story in the Bible and the Ibrahim story in the Qur’an. In the Qur’an, Abraham openly shares God’s command with his son (a son who is unnamed, though in Islamic tradition he is assumed to be Ishmael rather than Isaac) and even asks for the son’s reaction, “My son! Surely I saw in a dream that I am going to sacrifice you. So look what do you think?” The son replies, “My Father! Do what you are commanded. You will find me, if God pleases, one of the patient” (37:102).⁴⁷ Thus the father and the son together submit to God’s command (37:103), and there is no bind between the ethical and the religious. In the biblical account, Isaac displays another type of piety – quietly acquiescing to his father’s actions to which he ultimately remains in the dark. So he too is assigned a double secret: the secret of not knowing Abraham’s intentions (which he does not question, but certainly ascertains at some point) and the “super-secret” of knowing exactly what Abraham is thinking (which he forever will not know). If every other is totally other, if one cannot distinguish between the infinite alterity of God and that of every human, then one would expect Derrida to share this same focus on Isaac.

To be fair, Derrida does discuss the complex relationship between the father, the son, and literature in “Literature in Secret” while exploring Kafka’s famous *Letter to His Father*. In the letter, Kafka accuses his father of being emotionally abusive and hypocritical, even as he accuses himself of failing to be a good son. Adding a certain sense of fictionality to the letter (thereby blurring the lines between letter and literature), Kafka often takes on the voice of his father in which he responds to his son’s accusations, and to which the son then responds to the father’s responses. Thus, the letter is not just from son to father, but also from father to son, and, ultimately, from son to son. When the father grants or denies pardon for the son’s accusations, this is in fact Kafka pardoning or denying pardon for himself, a vertiginous scene which Derrida naturally parallels to the Abrahamic moment and *pardon de ne pas vouloir dire*. There is more secrecy to the letter, however, as it was (perhaps) never intended to be read by Kafka’s father – nor by anyone else, since Kafka had commanded his friend Max Brod to destroy all his manuscripts after his (Kafka’s) death.⁴⁸ The letter,

47 A.J. Droge, trans., *The Qur’an: A New Annotated Translation* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013).

48 Chris Danta observes that there is an analogy to be made between Kafka’s request that his books be burnt and Genesis 22, particularly the fact neither Brod nor Abraham actually

quite literally, was intended to be “literature in secret.” But if it had not been published or available to public readings, then how would it be “literature”? This is where the importance of the son takes place, both in Kafka’s *Letter to His Father* and in Genesis 22.

Fictive, literary, secret, but not necessarily private, the letter remains, without remaining, between the son and himself. But sealed deep within the heart – in secrecy, or at least the *secretary* – of a son who writes to himself ... this secret letter becomes literature, in the literality of its letter(s), only once it exposes itself and risks becoming something public and publishable, an archive to be inherited, still a phenomenon, one of inheritance, or a will that Kafka doesn’t destroy. For, as in the sacrifice of Isaac, which took place without witnesses, or whose only surviving witness was the son, namely a chosen beneficiary who saw his father’s tortured visage at the moment he lifted the knife over him, it all comes down to us only in the trace left by an inheritance, a trace that remains legible but equally illegible.⁴⁹

Isaac, by default, is the chosen beneficiary, the sole witness. He sur-vives (over-lives) this sacrifice, oscillating between martyr and unwilling participant. To be a martyr is to refuse to falsify one’s testimony even at the point of death, but Isaac does not die – instead, he is left with the traces of this gift of death. He cannot share the secret, as it is unknowable to him (and is not something he could “know” anyway), but he inherits these traces nonetheless. It is somewhat like a Lamarckian memory, a secret that the father passes on to the son, and thus is made public, even though the father himself remains held to the secret’s secrecy.

(11) It is worth repeating – the story ends with the sur-vival of the son. Certainly, however, one must appreciate the alternative possibility, that in the mad

followed through with their respective “tasks.” He writes: “Brod’s decision not to burn Kafka’s work as requested parallels the moment in Genesis 22 when the angel of the Lord calls Isaac’s sacrifice off and allows the ram to be substituted for the beloved son. It is, in other words, the moment of grace that bestows meaning upon the attempted sacrifice of the work’s very condition of possibility, which is time itself” (*Literature Suspends Death: Sacrifice and Storytelling in Kierkegaard, Kafka, and Blanchot* [New York: Continuum, 2011], 70). For Danta, this avoidance, or rather, suspension, of (human) death is where literature emerges (see also his essay, “Derrida and the Test of Secrecy,” *Angelaki* 18, no. 2 [2013]: 61-75).

49 Derrida, “Literature in Secret,” 144.

moment that Abraham raised his knife above the altar that the deed was done (in some way).⁵⁰ There was, for instance, not only intention but also attempt to murder (a crime in our own law courts), which was only diverted by an exterior cause (by divine intervention). Taking into account psychoanalytic logic, moreover, one could point out that the unconscious does not know the difference between the virtual and the actual, between the intention and the action.⁵¹ Finally, the biblical text itself leaves traces that suggest as much, as in the haunting image of Abraham returning to his servants alone, with no mention of Isaac, in Gen 22:19. From this image the text skips to a genealogy of Nahor and his descendants in vv. 20-24 which ends the chapter, as if the Terahite line will continue but not through Isaac.

On the other hand, it is as erroneous to dismiss this possibility as it is to ignore the ending altogether. This is Kierkegaard's glaring omission, as he concerns himself so deeply with the demand for sacrifice that he necessarily imagines it to have taken place. Emmanuel Lévinas points out that one could read otherwise:

In his evocation of Abraham, [Kierkegaard] describes the encounter with God at the point where subjectivity rises to the level of the religious, that is to say, above ethics. But one could think the opposite: Abraham's attentiveness to the voice that led him back to the ethical order, in forbidding him to perform a human sacrifice, is the highest point in the drama ... It is here, in ethics, that there is an appeal to the uniqueness of the subject, and a bestowal of meaning to life, despite death.⁵²

At the very least one should remember that there are two divine commands in the text and Abraham listens to both. Had Abraham not kept his ears open, had he not kept alive the possibility that this was a test, then he would not have set down the knife.

This retraction brings us back to the etymology and originary uses of religion/*religio*. It is a moment of unbinding, of the physical unbinding of Isaac as

50 This argument is made not only in Midrash (and Wilfred Owen's poem, "The Parable of the Old Man and the Young"), but also from some historical critics who believe that the earliest source for the story did indeed have Abraham murdering his son (see Richard Friedman, *The Bible with Sources Revealed* [San Francisco: Harper, 2003], 65).

51 This is precisely what Derrida points out when discussing Freud's position that Moses was indeed murdered by the Israelites, see *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Perenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 66-67.

52 Emmanuel Lévinas, *Proper Names*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 77; see also Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 79, n.6.

much as the unbinding of the previous demand for sacrifice. It is also a moment of scruples, of hesitation and reconsideration. That Abraham listens to God's second command displays his openness to the future (to come); he keeps open the possibility that the bond to the other can entail retraction and paradoxical commands. Without this (assumption of) retraction from the wholly other, without scruples and the possibility of unbinding, there could be no secret – and consequently no religion and literature.

This helps explain Derrida's preoccupation in "Literature in Secret" with the "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as distinct from the God of philosophers and ontotheology, [as] a God who retracts."⁵³ In his discussion of the Flood story, for instance, he singles out the two moments when God expresses regret: "And Yahweh was sorry (נחם) that he had made humankind on the earth and it was a grievance to his heart. And Yahweh said, 'I will blot out the humans I have created from upon the face of the land – from humans and animals to creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry (נחם) I have made them'" (Gen 6:6-7). But while Yahweh regrets his own creation, he still holds it accountable in some sense. Derrida thus comments: "As if [God] wouldn't forgive humans and the other living creatures for his own fault, the evil within them, namely their desire, whereas it was he who committed the sin of putting it in them. As if, in short, by the same token, he wouldn't forgive himself for the misdeed, the evil produced by his creation, namely man's desire."⁵⁴ It is no mistake, moreover, that "Literature in Secret" ends with the similar divine retraction in Genesis 22 (even though it was a test from the very beginning), in which Derrida states: "Suspending the sacrifice by his own initiative, sending down his angel with a second address, he cries out, calls Abraham and *swears*. But he swears only *before himself*, saying it, avowing it, or claiming it. How could he do otherwise? Could he mean (to say) anything other than this tautology that means (to say) nothing? [*Pourrait-il vouloir dire autre chose que cette tautologie qui ne veut dire ?*]."⁵⁵

(12) Kafka, in his retelling of Genesis 22, likewise knows that with every "believe me" and every "here I am," there is a "pardon for not meaning (to say)," the possibility of deceit, fiction, and retraction. He ends his own parable with that of an Abraham who comes unsummoned. This Abraham is likened to a terrible student who, perhaps having made a mistake of hearing, rises to receive an award just as the best student was expected to rise. Though "perhaps," Kafka muses, "he had made no mistake at all, his name really was

53 Derrida, "Literature in Secret," 125.

54 Derrida, "Literature in Secret," 150.

55 Derrida, "Literature in Secret," 158.

called, it having been the teacher's intention to make the rewarding of the best student at the same time a punishment for the worst one."⁵⁶ This undecidability is paramount to the Abrahamic moment; it is the other side of the "leap of faith." Writing about Kafka's description of this Abraham, Derrida asserts:

[A]nyone responding to the call must continue to doubt, to ask himself whether he has heard right, whether there is no original misunderstanding ... The possibility of an originary misunderstanding in destination is not an evil, it is the structure, perhaps the very vocation of any call worthy of that name, of all nomination, of all response and responsibility.⁵⁷

To keep this doubt in mind but respond nonetheless – this too is *religio*. And in this vein perhaps it does not matter so much whether the word comes from *religare* or *relegere*, for both still leave us with the enigmatic "re-," and "[a]ll the categories of which we could make use to translate the common meaning of 're-' would be inadequate ... because they can only *re*-introduce into the definition what has to be defined, as though it had already been defined."⁵⁸ The correspondence between binding and unbinding, the scruple and the superstition, is reiteration – hence why "old stories" like those of Abraham are still re-read. So long as there is more time, another response is always called for, another reading that, perhaps, does not avoid the question of religion.

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⁵⁶ Kafka, *Parables and Paradoxes*, 45.

⁵⁷ Derrida, "Abraham, the Other" in *Judeities: Questions for Jacques Derrida*, eds. Bettina Bergo, Joseph Cohen, and Rapheal Zagury-Orly, trans. Bettina Bergo and Michael B. Smith (New York: Fordham Press, 2007): 1-35 (34).

⁵⁸ Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," 74.

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Practicing Pluralism: Re-Conceptualizing Introduction to World Religions Courses as a Vehicle for Inter-Cultural Competence

Salima Versi and Ehud Ben Zvi

Upon entering a Canadian university, students are given a plethora of choices – they may choose from any number of disciplines, and any number of courses both within their chosen discipline and outside of it.¹ Among these choices is an “Introduction to World Religions” course (for the sake of simplicity “RELIG 100” in this essay), available at most universities and colleges in Canada. This course is taken by many students, most of whom are not Religious Studies majors, whether out of interest in the subject matter, or (unfortunately), because it is anecdotally considered to be an easier option than other liberal arts classes.

The Current Model

Regardless of students’ motivation for taking the course, however, most academic institutions tend to see RELIG 100 as one among several 100-level courses designed to provide students with some basic liberal arts grounding. Thus, RELIG 100 is usually considered a “service” course. Although teaching techniques, pedagogical approaches, and the amount of methodological discussion varies from instructor to instructor and from institution to institution, it is not difficult to speak of RELIG 100 courses in general. In fact, one may say

¹ It is our pleasure to dedicate this essay to Francis Landy. Salima, who has recently taught this course, had the privilege of being one of Francis’ students and was therefore able to experience his truly inspiring commitment to instilling critical thinking skills and a love for knowledge in his students. Francis and Ehud have had conversations on these issues for decades. In fact, some of the ideas expressed here were articulated in a lecture given by Ehud, some time ago, with Francis in the audience, which was followed by additional conversations between the two. We are delighted that the editors of this volume found it appropriate to honor Francis’ outstanding contributions to his students and colleagues and his deeply-felt, and socially and ethically-centered interest on the teaching of ‘world religions’ with the inclusion of an essay on these matters, and one co-written by a former student and a long-time colleague.

that there is something akin to an academic genre of “Introduction to World Religions.”²

These courses, therefore, take on the character of what J.Z. Smith calls “generalist education.”³ As Smith notes, this is a pragmatic form that functions as a survey or introductory course, which stands in contrast to specialist education. In the case of Religious Studies, the generalist education provided by RELIG 100 is meant to be a stepping stone to further study, in which students would gain more specialized knowledge of a particular religious tradition or facet of religion.⁴

Given the generalist nature of these courses, they usually consist of “what we would be embarrassed by if our students did not know.”⁵ As such these courses usually follow a basic pattern, which can be found in most introductory World Religions textbooks, such as Oxtoby’s⁶ or Esposito’s.⁷ These textbooks devote a single chapter to each of the religions usually labelled as “major” world religions, namely Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, and Daoism, and at times Shinto as well⁸, although in recent years, other religious traditions have been added, such as Native North American traditions, Sikhism (mainly in Canada) and also African traditions such as Yoruban religion (mainly in the USA). Each chapter discusses central texts,

2 The number of textbooks that exists for such a course again reveal that there is something like a “genre” of “Introduction to World Religions.” Additionally, the DSST Fact Sheet for “Introduction to World Religions” reflects and underscores the existence of such a genre of “Introduction to World Religions.” See “DSST Introduction to World Religions.” DSST. Accessed August 18, 2017, <http://getcollegedcredit.com/assets/pdf/dsst_fact_sheets/DSST_IntroductiontoWorldReligions.pdf>

3 Jonathan Z. Smith, “Teaching the Bible in the Context of General Education,” *Teaching Theology and Religion* 1, no. 2 (1998): 74.

4 These courses should be clearly distinguished from courses meant to introduce students to the academic study of religion, which tend to include a survey of the history of Religious Studies as an area of studies (or “discipline”) and the various methodological approaches that have been used to advance knowledge about the socio-cultural phenomenon we may call “religion.”

5 Smith, “Teaching the Bible,” 74.

6 Willard G. Oxtoby, Amir Hussain, and Roy C. Amore, eds., *World Religions: Western Traditions* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2014).

7 John L. Esposito et al., *World Religions Today: Canadian Edition* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2009).

8 The course may be sub-divided into two courses, typically one on “Eastern religions” (containing Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and various Eastern Asian traditions) and another on “Western religions” (usually covering Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). This subdivision is, as is well-known, very problematic and to a large extent misleading.

venerated figures, as well as some basic terms and practices. There is also a substantial amount of historical survey that implicitly conveys a sense that the foundational historical events and characters and the first layer of historical development of the particular religious traditions deserve much more attention than later events and processes, though some of the newer books do attempt to include, to some extent, recent developments.⁹

Critiques of the Model

While the current model of RELIG 100 serves its purposes, those purposes, as Smith points out, are largely pragmatic, “from providing faculty groups with full-time equivalents (FTES) and, in university-related colleges, employment for their graduate students to allowing college students the opportunity to ‘shop around’ for possible majors and vocational interests.”¹⁰ While these aims are certainly a practical reality for many programs, they are arguably not in the best interests of students’ education in religion or society in general.

First and foremost, the assumption that the courses are a “stepping stone” to further study in religion is clearly faulty. As Gallagher notes “most of our students will be ‘one and done.’”¹¹ From a pragmatic perspective, these single-course students are the “lifeblood of our departments.”¹² Without diminishing the importance of this course as a stepping stone for further studies on particular religious traditions or as a recruiting tool for programs in Religious Studies or for fulfilling its other pragmatic goals, it is fairly obvious that the course is, at its core, a *service* course, i.e., as a course meant as a service to the larger community of students, whether or not they are in humanities and social science faculties. These courses are meant to contribute, above all, to the community in general. As such, one could argue that it should meet the needs of that larger community first, before those of the small minority of students who will go on to become Religious Studies majors.

Another major problem facing these courses is the Eastern/Western dichotomy that exists in most RELIG 100 structures. Usually, this means a one-term class on Western traditions and another one-term class on Eastern traditions. In our own program at the University of Alberta, we have recently moved over

9 See Oxtoby, Hussein, and Amore, *World Religions*.

10 Smith, “Teaching the Bible in the Context of General Education,” 74.

11 Eugene V. Gallagher, “Teaching for Religious Literacy,” *Teaching Theology and Religion* 12, no. 3 (2009): 210.

12 Gallagher, “Teaching for Religious Literacy,” 209.

to this model from a full-year World Religions class, a change that reflects a shift in many other Religious Studies departments across the country. In fact, we might be among the last programs in Canada to make this switch.

There is a clear pragmatic reality underpinning this split, namely it allows both students and instructors more flexibility, which can often translate into more students taking the class, which again serves to strengthen claims of Religious Studies programs when it comes to requesting resources from the relevant levels of University administration. However, the problematic character of this division, of each of the terms involved, and the classification nightmares it creates, as well as the messages that it sends to students, are all known. Indeed, many of us write caveats to this effect into our syllabi or discuss them in our first few classes.

Among the plethora of issues and connoted meanings that the split raises and which are all well-known, we would like to draw particular attention to the fact that this kind of division does not reflect the reality in which today's students exist. It is just the product of a bygone era in Religious Studies, and is rife with the assumptions of that era,¹³ and is therefore an unsuitable model for learning about religion here and now. In particular, the existing model does not effectively account for our post-colonial, global reality. Indeed, as DeTemple notes, this is so much a reality that "several textbooks use both 'religion' and either 'global' or 'globalization' in the title."¹⁴ In this environment, RELIG 100 takes on a new significance. As Ramey notes, "in the post-colonial (or perhaps neo-colonial) world, with its global economy and the increasingly global migrations of people who make even small towns in the United States more diverse, this introduction to diversity is increasingly vital."¹⁵ That is to say, RELIG 100 courses often function as a way in which to introduce students to information about their lived experiences of diversity. This diversity involves not only the "major" religions to which chapters are devoted in the usual textual books, and others as well, but also much diversity within each of these religious traditions (see below).

13 There are any number of excellent works that deal with these assumptions. See, for example, Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

14 Jill DeTemple, "Home is my Area Code: Thinking About, Teaching, and Learning Globalization in Introductory World Religions Classes," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 15, no. 1 (2012): 61.

15 Steven W. Ramey, "Critiquing Borders: Teaching About Religions in a Postcolonial World," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 9, no. 4 (2006): 212.

Of course, experiences of religious diversity at multiple levels, locally and globally, create a strong need for religious literacy. This is another area that has received considerable attention as of late. Prothero, in his volume on the subject, defines religious literacy as “the ability to understand and use the religious terms, symbols, images, beliefs, practices, scriptures, heroes, themes, and stories that are employed in American public life.”¹⁶ He, like others, notes that one’s education is not complete without at least one course in Religious Studies. Others scholars, like Gallagher¹⁷ and Asani¹⁸, go even further, noting that the “what” of religion on its own is insufficient. To really be literate in religion, one needs to understand the “how.” As Gallagher notes, “religious literacy must involve not only a degree of mastery of basic information (such as when to perform the prescribed actions during a Roman Catholic Mass or during Muslim daily prayers – what Prothero calls ritual literacy) but also some insight into how people use that basic information to orient themselves in the world.”¹⁹

Our current model of RELIG 100 unfortunately overemphasizes the “what,” to the detriment of students’ ability to understand and articulate the “how.” It tends to emphasize past societies (or better stated, memories of those past societies) over present day, global and local societies, communities and sub-communities. Given the world in which we live, the consequences of religious illiteracy in general, and even those of religious literacy limited to ritual literacy, are dire, including, as Asani notes, “curtailment of historical and cultural understanding, the fueling of culture wars, and the promotion of religious and racial bigotry.”²⁰

The current model’s overemphasis on the “what” has the additional side-effect of presenting students with a very limited view of the diversity within religious traditions. In an attempt to condense religious traditions into easily digestible, single-chapter phenomena, instructors usually end up focusing on what they often consider to be “majority” traditions. So, for example, often primacy is given to Catholic ritual life in Christianity or Sunni practices in Islam or Orthodox concepts and practices in Judaism. The diverse range of practices present in religious traditions, especially those of minority versions of “world”

16 Stephen R. Prothero, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know – and Doesn’t* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 2008), 13.

17 Gallagher, “Teaching for Religious Literacy,” 208.

18 Ali S. Asani, “Enhancing Religious Literacy in Liberal Arts Education through the Study of Islam and Muslim Societies,” in *The Harvard Sampler: Liberal Education for the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Evelyn M. Hammonds, Stephen M. Kosslyn, & Jennifer M. Shepard (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 4.

19 Gallagher, “Teaching for Religious Literacy,” 208.

20 Asani, “Enhancing Religious Literacy,” 3.

religions, are rarely given time and space in generalist survey courses of religion. The result is often that students are given the impression that they have a grasp on the entirety of a religion, when, in fact, they have only been given a very limited window into it; at times, a window that profoundly impairs the ability of students to understand the religious experiences of other students, members of their general community, and so on.

To be sure, no course can or should attempt to cover all religious traditions represented in the world or even in any typical large city in North America or Western Europe, and certainly not all their inner variety, even if its focus is mainly on the present. But what is included or excluded from such a course carries a message. The course should be able to cover more traditions than those usually covered in the traditional Introductions to World Religions and should allow students to devote time to study and develop an understanding of issues that are not taught or only marginally taught in the conventional first-year World Religions courses.

The location of the academic institution must also be taken into account. For instance, a course taught in our institution (University of Alberta, Canada) should devote time to constructions and experiences of native spirituality by natives and non-natives, present Mormon religious experiences in Alberta and elsewhere, present Pentecostal religious experiences, and diverse Muslim groups and experiences both globally and locally – including, for instance, Ismaili religious experiences in Edmonton and globally. One should also include experiences of “Sikhism” both in Western Canada and Punjab, present civic religions in Canada, as well as New Age spirituality and the growth and impact in worldview of hybrid eastern-local practices such as Yoga, which have a quite strong presence in most cities and towns in Canada. Matters of hybridity, fluidity and mutual influence among religious traditions are also rarely studied in any depth. All too often we end up reinforcing silo-like, internally homogenizing conceptualizations of religious traditions, and essentialist habits of thought among students, all of which are an impediment to true religious literacy.

Finally, from a historical perspective, one cannot but notice that despite the emphasis that is put on history in RELIG 100 courses, students in these courses rarely become aware that the “historical” narratives and characters they are learning are integral to the social/cultural memory of the particular religious community and that being so they should be better understood in terms of social memory rather than those of “critical, contemporary history,” with all that is implied. These matters are either not dealt with or only marginally approached and so is the case with the basic tools necessary to understand in historical terms the shaping and constant reshaping of foundational narratives

by various groups.²¹ Again, the problem is that such courses may end up strengthening, or at least not significantly challenging, uncritical habits of thought, with the concomitant social consequences.

A Possible Alternative

It is hopefully clear by now that the current model of RELIG 100 could use some improvement. We therefore arrive at the main purpose of this article, which is meant to further the case for a reconceptualization of the traditional model of an introductory World Religions course. In other words, it is about moving away from the common “genre” of these courses. On the surface, it is about a shift from the stress from historical considerations and from prescribed, traditional core concepts and rituals, to the way in which religious traditions are lived *and construed* today by various groups of participants.

The shift is, however, not a goal in itself, but just a tool meant to facilitate the development of a degree of inter-cultural competence that would allow students to interact effectively and positively in the diverse local and global village, in which there exist multiple versions of religious traditions, some form of hybridity is a common place, and identities are continuously re-shaped and at the same time seen in continuity with the past.²²

To conceptualize the genre of RELIG 100 within this context, a pragmatic understanding of “intercultural competence” is needed at the very least. Following others, we understand the concept to mean “the ability to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations and to relate appropriately in a variety of cultural circumstances.”²³ Obviously religious traditions are an inte-

21 To be sure, the tendency to simply present “commonly accepted” historical metanarratives in textbooks for 100 levels is a widely attested problem that is not limited to RELIG 100. Still, substantial sections of RELIG 100 courses often resemble an “odd” historical course, both in terms of lack of critical methodological controls and in terms of narratives that tend to deal mainly or only with the history of “religious” matters (including ideas, worldviews, rituals) as if the latter could be approached without recourse to the “general” history of the communities in which these ideas, rituals, worldviews and the like were shaped and constantly reshaped.

22 If RELIG 100 is conceptualized along these lines of inter-cultural studies, the concept of inter-cultural competence becomes very important and so do the kinds of issues usually dealt in identity, group and diaspora studies, and those raised by the study of religious communities as “imagined” or “mnemonic” groups.

23 J.M. Bennett & M.J. Bennett, “Developing Intercultural Sensitivity: An Integrative Approach to Global and Domestic Diversity,” in D. Landis, J.M. Bennett, and M.J. Bennett,

gral part, and at times among the most emotionally charged components of cultural identities. Inter-cultural competence is impossible without “inter-religious competence.” Conversely, one of the best pathways to develop skills in intercultural competence is to develop some inter-religious competence.

Developing inter-religious competence in the “real” world involves developing skills, knowledge, and an appropriate attitude, along with an ability to discard commonly held stereotypes and usually held meta-narratives that serve more as coping or defense mechanisms than means to understand “the other,” including essentializing tendencies, all too common in the traditional genre of RELIG 100. That is to say, this new version of the course would take into account Locklin, Tiemeier, and Vento’s third premise, namely that “traditions of study and dialogue (premise #2) should be evaluated in light of relationships with religious persons (premise #1) rather than the other way around.”²⁴

To begin unpacking these matters, an important starting point is a heuristic (and only heuristic) distinction between the so called “objective culture” and so-called “subjective culture.”²⁵ For the present purposes, the former refers to general cultural “products,” be they institutions, texts, art, or music. The latter refers to the way in which the former are experienced or construed, that is, to worldviews that construe social reality and provide meaning to it. For example, one may say that many Jews celebrate Passover every year and as they do so, they eat *matzot* (pieces of unleavened bread). These Jews share an institution (Passover) and food. Both are cultural products. Of course, it is a good and necessary for learners to know something about these “objective” cultural elements. But this is only the first step. The second and far more important, if they are to develop some inter-cultural competence, is to develop an understanding of what *matzah* (generic singular of *matzot*) and Passover actually means for the Jews they encounter, both locally and globally. Passover and *matzah*, as “objective” products, may well remain the same, but not only do today’s traditionalist, orthodox, liberal, or secular Jews assign substantially different meanings to them, but the very meanings they assign are constantly re-created and re-shaped. In other words, these “objective” products are constantly re-

eds., *Handbook of Intercultural Training* (3rd ed.; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing, 2004), 149.

24 Reid B. Locklin, Tracy Tiemeier, & Johann M. Vento, “Teaching World Religious Without Teaching ‘World Religions,’” *Teaching Theology and Religion* 15, no. 2 (2012): 166.

25 Of course, “objective” and “subjective” are problematic terms. We use them here only for practical reasons and because of the terms “objective culture” and “subjective culture” are well used in some discourses relevant to the point being made.

signified in the experience of individual Jews and diverse Jewish families, and against the background of different social, political, economic, cultural and religious environments. As these products are constantly re-signified, the self-understanding of the Jews that the learners encounter is constantly re-shaped. To simply stop at the description of a *matzah* – or show one in class, or to read a few verses from the book of Exodus, or even to teach, often in a very cursory way, a (for the most part, orthodox or traditionalist) prescriptive behavior before and during Passover would not do much to help in inter-cultural communication, and in fact, often may tamper with it, for it may help create an illusion of understanding “the other,” and in some cases, even a construction of what “the other” should be and against which they measure the behavior of their neighbor.

The example of Passover and *matzah* is Jewish, but the point is not restricted to Jews. The very same considerations apply to “practitioners” of any other religious tradition. As they practice it, they constantly re-signify it. Moreover, whether admitted or not, inter-cultural interactions are always involved in the process, and often so are matters of diasporic settings, colonial and post-colonial experiences and therefore *constructed* social memories, as well as minority vs. majority interactions, both within the general community, and within the particular groups with which the practitioners identify.

Although these considerations are relevant to historical studies – particularly to those that focus on intellectual and social history – inter-cultural competence, at least as commonly understood, involves the ability to effectively communicate with living people, not dead ones. Thus this type of re-conceptualizing RELIG 100 requires a focus on the present, and on present-day “objective” religious products and above all as they are construed by the various groups “engaging” with them.

Moreover, it should focus not on critical history (or teach a simplistic and often uncritical history), but on social memories presently held (and often, constantly reshaped and re-signified) by various communities; these memories, irrelevant of their degree of “historicity” by critical academic standards, influence and shape the living communities and individuals, and their experiences. Moreover, it must focus on “religious traditions as lived today” in all their inner and outer variety, and on the contingent as opposed to supposedly normative essences and seemingly universal behaviors within a particular tradition.

The course should be designed to facilitate learners’ development of basic knowledge, to be sure, but with an attitude towards other religious traditions and their own that involves tolerance for multiple meanings, for ambiguities, and for diversity against a supposed background of the “sameness” associated

with each religious tradition. This attitude is a necessary stepping stone on their way to develop skills that involve not only appropriate inter-religious behavior, but also an ability to effectively understand others along with the proper emotional attitude that are necessary for any advanced level of inter-cultural competence.

To a large extent the point of learning about all these discrete instances or sets of experiences is to help the learners cultivate a habit of mind and acquire the basic knowledge that would facilitate their minimal understanding of religious traditions as experienced by groups, even if the latter were not explicitly discussed in the course. In other words, the point is to help learners develop a *grammar* that would allow them to decode religious traditions as experienced by their neighbors, and thus to develop inter-religious and through it, inter-cultural competence.

In general, therefore, the proposed course aims to meet the objectives laid out by Ramey in his critique, namely:

1. "To promote an appreciation for religious diversity, both between and within each religion."
2. "To understand religion as practiced in contemporary life, what is often referred to as lived religion."
3. "To foster critical thinking."²⁶

These are specific objectives that can be met by the type of course proposed, but the overarching goal we propose is to encourage the practice of pluralism. As Diana Eck notes on Harvard's Pluralism Project website, "pluralism is not diversity alone, but *the energetic engagement with diversity* ... [it is] not just tolerance, but the *active seeking of understanding across lines of difference*" (emphasis in the original).²⁷ This kind of energetic engagement and active seeking of understanding is the most reasonable approach to take for Religious Studies in a country whose citizens regularly cite its diversity and multiculturalism as a key source of pride and which is often involved in matters of self-identity.²⁸ In such a population, deep and committed engagement with

26 Ramey, "Critiquing Borders," 212.

27 Diana L. Eck, "What is Pluralism," *The Pluralism Project*, last modified 2006, <<http://pluralism.org/what-is-pluralism/>>

28 See, for example, Andrew Parkin & Matthew Mendelson, *A New Canada: An Identity Shaped by Diversity* (Ottawa, ON: Center for Research and Information Canada, 2003), 3. <https://library.carleton.ca/sites/default/files/find/data/surveys/pdf_files/cric-gmnc-03-not_000.pdf>.

religious diversity, rather than superficial examinations of religious ritual, is not only desirable but is arguably a necessity if we are to continue to move forward. The type of inter-cultural competence that this practice of pluralism facilitates will allow students to move past the superficial language of tolerance and into a more authentic understanding of what it means to coexist with those who are different from oneself.

It is worth noting that this approach also requires a good deal from the students themselves. Eck notes that the third feature of pluralism is “not relativism, but the *encounter of commitments* ... [Pluralism] means holding our deepest differences, even our religious differences, not in isolation, but in relationship to one another” (emphasis in the original).²⁹ It therefore requires not only an awareness of “the other” but also “self-awareness.” In a society in which many people see themselves as non-religious, secular, “noners” or the like, it is important to emphasize that “religious” experiences and worldviews are not necessarily what “the other” has or lives through. Thus, civic religions, worldview systems reflected and reinforced and reshaped through social/cultural memory, common rituals, shared and humanistic approaches should all be included among the contents taught in the course.

It is worth stressing that to do so requires that both positive and negative stereotypes be discarded, along with meta-narratives that co-opt “the other” into a sameness that reflects a particular conception of the self (e.g., the idea that theology or doctrine are central to “religion,” the construction of universals that actually reflect the particular). Needless to say, the development of that skill requires a level of the tolerance for multiple meanings and re-signification processes, for ambiguities and for finding diversity in sameness and sameness in diversity, while refusing to let one overshadow the other.

There is no denying that a course like this would be transformative. In fact, some maintain that true, global education is by necessity transformative, and here there may lie a significant obstacle to overcome.³⁰ We refer here to the seemingly “open,” but actually ethnocentric position according to which “mainstream” learners may and should be “transformed” through their studies, but that the same does necessarily apply to the “non-mainstream” (e.g., the

29 Eck, “What is Pluralism.”

30 “Global education is transformative, not conservative; students are often challenged to examine and perhaps change their assumptions and values. This transformative view of education is especially problematic in cross-cultural contexts where foreign teachers are trying to respect the cultural values of the students and not impose alien ones” (p. 15) Brenda Dyer & Brenda Bushel, “World Issues or A Global Perspective?,” *The Language Teacher* 20, 11 (1996): 15, <<http://jalt-publications.org/tlt/articles/2065-world-issues-or-global-perspective>>.

non-secular) learners among us. Such an attitude exists here and there. It reflects and results from a "defense worldview" that polarizes "us-them" distinctions so as to consolidate an inner group in the face of and particularly against a background of diversity.³¹

Even more problematic from a pragmatic viewpoint, is the often implicit, and at times explicit, pedagogical goal of some inter-cultural learning programs, namely to facilitate the development of a sense among all the learners that multiple cultures are equally valid, that although one may like one's own more, no culture is intrinsically better or worse than the other. Whatever one's position on the matter, such an expectation should *not* be attached to any course aimed at developing inter-religious competence. To be sure, some learners would develop such an approach and would find it consonant with their own religious traditions, as they experience and construe them. But any properly conceived course that deals with the matters discussed here must acknowledge already at the conceptual level and at any stage during its actual delivery that such an approach is antithetic to the main gist of some religious traditions held dearly by some of the learners. Many religious traditions, including some "secular" traditions, claim to be the only true or the most valid religion/worldview.

A course that requires learners to relativize such claims or one that directly or indirectly construes religious relativism as a *pre-condition* for interreligious and intercultural competence will fail to involve in any positive way students who identify with these traditions, and may in fact hinder their ability to develop actual intercultural competence. This is so because such a course, as well-intentioned as it may well be, will most likely trigger among these students strong defensive attitudes (including social behaviors and constructions of reality) due to a perception of being under attack (they themselves or their religious beliefs) by an homogenizing discourse-controlling majority that excludes them, and at best, implicitly marginalizes and discriminates against them.

Moreover, students who do not identify with traditions that maintain that they hold the only true or the most valid religion/worldview will also be strongly affected. Some of them are likely to develop a polarized construction of social reality in terms of "us" (i.e., those who accept religious/worldview relativism) and "them" (i.e., those who do not), and will develop their own defensive attitudes.

31 See Bennett & Bennett, "Developing Intercultural Sensitivity," 154. Mild forms of this approach are popular today in, for instance, some constructions of hyphenated Canadians. The issue, of course, is well beyond the scope of this essay.

Instead, if the course is to achieve its aim to facilitate inter-religious and inter-cultural competence, it should aim at enabling the development of a sense of acceptance of both degrees of sameness and of substantial diversity within and among religious traditions and that *no* view of the world is universally shared.³² That is to say, the course should allow students to engage in a fruitful dialogue. As Eck notes “the language of pluralism is that of dialogue and encounter, give and take, criticism and self-criticism. Dialogue means both speaking and listening, and that process reveals both common understandings and real differences.”³³ This dialogue, Eck notes, is the fourth component to pluralism.

Significant inter-religious and inter-cultural competence both globally and locally, and certainly any sense of global or local *mindedness* is actually impossible without an ability to take for granted that one’s viewpoint and the viewpoint of others are all an integral part of the global and local human landscape. Any such acceptance does not imply (and should not be construed as implying) agreement or even necessarily personal liking for the positions of others, but respect for, willingness, and ability to interact and positively communicate with those whose religious traditions are different from their own and learn from such interactions.

In general, however, this re-conceptualized model of RELIG 100 would allow students to be better global (as well as local) citizens, more capable of engaging effectively with the increasingly diverse and interconnected world in which they live. It also addresses some of the major theoretical critiques of the existing model, as well as the more practical critiques, as we shall see.

Some Tools

The reconceptualization described above involves also matters of pedagogy and practical teaching and administrative decisions. As we all know, teaching methods and approaches influence what is being taught and vice versa. For one, an “instructionalist” pedagogic approach is unlikely to be as helpful as a

32 Hanvey defined perspective consciousness as: “The recognition or awareness on the part of the individual that he or she has a view of the world that is not universally shared, that this view of the world has been and continues to be shaped by influences that often escape conscious detection, and that others have a view of the world that are profoundly different from our own.” See R. Hanvey, “An Attainable Global Perspective,” *Theory into Practice* 21, no. 3 (1982): 162.

33 Eck, “What is Pluralism.”

“learner-oriented” and decidedly “constructivist” one in this case. The course title should shift from “Introduction to World Religions” to something like “Friends and Neighbors: Learning about the Religious Traditions in Your Local and Global Community.” Such a title, while certainly lengthier, would reflect a pedagogic constructivist approach, but even more importantly, would communicate to the students from the outset that the course is about both the local and the global environment and their interrelation. Moreover, it is meant to reflect the fact that “you” and “your neighbor” interact constantly and in multiple ways with various “local” and “global” socio-cultural webs.

In addition to changing the masthead for the course, one would also need to reconsider its staffing. The usual RELIG 100 is developed and taught by academic Religious Studies staff. However, as J.Z. Smith notes, “teachers of the Bible need to be as informed about research in teaching as they are in biblical research.”³⁴ Similarly, teachers of religion must be as informed about inter-cultural education as they are in religious studies. They may also involve colleagues in a number of other disciplines in one way or another in order to achieve this goal. Moreover, the course may well serve students at academic institutions, but may also include members of the general community, who may face issues of inter-cultural competence in their lives, whether at work, in social circles, or elsewhere.

In terms of course content, the re-conceptualized course should allow students to compare diverse representations of religious traditions. Ramey suggests one way to do this would be through set theory³⁵, or, as Daftary calls them, communities of interpretation.³⁶ As Ramey notes, “this hermeneutic device shifts the question from ‘Why don’t these people follow their own religion properly?’ to ‘How does each group or individual construct and understand their own set?’”³⁷ This approach can ensure that students are exposed to a wide range of religious experiences that will help them both to grasp intra- and inter-religious diversity, as well as help them to build critical thinking tools that will allow them to examine other such examples as they arise in their lives. However, it is important that this process not fall into the trap of what J.Z. Smith calls the “e.g.” method: the inclusion of various examples without any real change in pedagogy or evaluation.³⁸

34 Smith, “Teaching the Bible in the Context of General Education,” 73.

35 Ramey, “Critiquing Borders,” 215.

36 Farhad Daftary, “Diversity in Islam: Communities of Interpretation,” in *The Muslim Almanac*, ed. Azim Nanji (Detroit, MI: Gale Research Inc., 1996): 161-173.

37 Ramey, “Critiquing Borders,” 217.

38 Smith, “Teaching the Bible in the Context of General Education,” 75.

Another important element in terms of content is the inclusion of a variety of sources. This includes primary source materials, novels, films, websites, guest speakers, and so on. Diversity in the presentation of information is another pedagogical tool to help students understand the diversity of traditions, and can help to make the course more engaging and interactive. It can also be an effective way to mirror the diversity of sources to which students will be exposed in their interactions out in the world. Student experiences of religion in their lives are very unlikely to come solely from academic textbooks on religion, and so an introductory course on religion should allow them to engage with a variety of sources, thereby further preparing them to engage with their lived realities of religion.

From a practical perspective, this variety of sources could mean that an instructor could drop the use of a textbook altogether, relying instead on various sources gathered together in a reading list or some similar device. DeTemple recommends this method, and has even included her list at the end of the article.³⁹ Ramey, on the other hand, notes a few textbooks that approach religion from a perspective conducive to this kind of course⁴⁰, including Fisher's *Living Religions*⁴¹ and Kessler's *Ways of Being Religious*.⁴² Even if one chooses to use a textbook, it is probably still a worthwhile exercise to include a variety of other sources.

In practice, these tools can result in a number of interesting methods for engaging students as they learn. Journaling, for example, is a method that allows students to consciously engage with their own subjectivities, while simultaneously attempting to digest course material. However, journaling should be undertaken in a rigorous and academic way. Walvoord, for example, provides the following example of a potential grading scheme: "C" is for doing the journaling on time and in a legible manner; 'B' is for asking critical questions and making connections; 'A' is for showing superior evaluative and critical thinking, and for demonstrating self-critical and creative reasoning in [one's] responses."⁴³ In this way, journaling can become a space in which students can ask critical questions and begin to integrate what they are learning into their lives.

39 DeTemple, "Home is my Area Code," 61, 68-70.

40 Ramey, "Critiquing Borders," 213.

41 Mary Pat Fisher, *Living Religions* (Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2014).

42 Gary E. Kessler, *Ways of Being Religious* (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publication Company, 2000).

43 Barbara E. Walvoord, "Students' Spirituality and 'Big Questions' in Introductory Religion Courses," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 11, no. 1 (2008): 7.

Related to this approach is the practice of writing down one's own and/or others' conceptions of a particular religious tradition before one engages in that unit, and then to revisit and potentially correct those assumptions once one has gone through the module.⁴⁴ Another exercise would be to ask students to journal about their "most significant change," which enables students to reflect on their own progress over the course of the class and consider the ways in which their own perspectives have shifted.⁴⁵

Another approach is to take an element that is common to many RELIG 100 courses, the visit to a place of worship, and add elements of critical thinking to it. Walvoord notes that in addition to a brief report on the visit, students can be asked to identify aspects that they found different, unanticipated, even confusing or irritating. From those aspects, they are then required to formulate questions that can then be posed to religious officials at the site in question. A complete assignment includes the description of the visit, the elements the student wanted to ask questions about, the questions and their responses, and finally, a reflection on why they identified the elements they did and what that might tell them about their own perspective.⁴⁶ This kind of thoroughly critical and reflective assignment can more fully reflect students' lived realities of religion and their engagement with religious traditions, especially those that are not their own.

One of the authors tried a combination of these tools in an assignment for a RELIG 100 course. Students were asked to speak to someone, anyone they liked, about their religion. They were then asked to analyze their conversation using secondary source material, including the course textbook, highlighting especially places in which the individual and the sources were in agreement and where they diverged. These elements were then utilized to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the secondary sources, as well as to illuminate a general discussion about the nature of the academic study of religion. The resulting papers were fascinating to read, and showed real engagement with religion as it played a role in students' own lives. They chose to interview parents, friends, and mentors, and their resulting conclusions were both insightful and illuminating. The paper could also include a self-reflective piece that would further students' integration of the subject with their existing conceptions about religion.

44 Walvoord, "Students' Spirituality and 'Big Questions,'" 9-10.

45 Locklin, Tiemeier, & Vento, "Teaching World Religions," 169.

46 Walvoord, "Students' Spirituality and 'Big Questions,'" 5-6.

Conclusion

Given all these considerations, the pedagogically sound path would be to develop this course as a shared project of faculty in Education, Humanities, Social Sciences and, whenever possible, faculty in Extension. In fact, this course could serve as a harbinger of central “service courses,” serving both students and the general community, fulfilling the motto of our own institution: “Uplifting the whole people,”⁴⁷ designed and taught by joint, inter-faculty teams. To be sure, traditional administrative structures are likely to hinder rather than facilitate the creation of these courses, but contributions such as this should serve to stimulate conversations leading to the creation of such courses. In the end, the goal of such courses would be to help students from various walks of life to practice pluralism in their own lives, with religion as it is discussed in the course serving as an exemplar of how to develop the kind of inter-cultural competence required for that endeavor.⁴⁸

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47 “What is Our Promise,” *University of Alberta*, accessed September 20, 2016, <<http://www.toolkit.ualberta.ca/WhatIsOurPromise.aspx>>.

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Enemies Within: Canaanite Nations and Spiritual Struggle in Hasidism

Justin Jaron Lewis

Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk (1717-1787) was a major early leader of Hasidic Judaism in Poland. A small but significant part of his literary legacy is his Tsetl Kotn קטן צטעטל. This is a “little list” of recommended spiritual practices, including visualizations as well as holy phrases to be recited in specific challenging moments. Among them is the following:

כשיתחיל להתעורר בו מדה רעה ח"ו ממדות רעות שהוא רגיל בהם כגון עקשנות ובושת של גאווה ועצלות ובטלה המביאה לידי שיעמום וכיוצא בהם יאמר תיכף ומיד בזה הלשון ובכל כחו הכנעני החתי האמורי הפריזי החייו והיבوسی והגרגשי וינצל.¹

When a bad trait begins to stir within you, heaven forbid – one of the bad traits (מדות *midot*) that you are accustomed to, such as stubbornness or prideful shame or laziness and time-wasting which lead to mental dullness, and the like – say, immediately, in these words, with all your strength: The Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizite, the Hivite, the Jebusite, and the Girgashite – and you will be rescued.

This is a remedy for bad *midot*, qualities or character traits, before they lead you astray. The list of the seven peoples or nations of Canaan, in this particular order, is a mash-up of two biblical verses which each mention six of them: Exodus 3:17, which omits the Girgashites, and Nehemiah 9:8, which omits the Hivites. Indeed, another early Hasidic version of this teaching refers to *six* nations, probably meaning that one of those verses should be recited verbatim. The following is from the so-called “ethical will of the Baal Shem Tov” (צוואת הריב"ש), containing teachings ascribed to both the Baal Shem Tov, founding figure of Hasidism (c. 1700-1760), and Dov Ber of Mezeritsh (d. 1772), regarded as his successor:

1 אלימלך מליזענסק, צעטל קטן ה' נועם אלימלך. Usually printed as an addition to the major book of his teachings, *נועם אלימלך*. Found on page 10 of the pdf copy of the edition consulted, available at <<http://hebrewbooks.org/19056>>. I have deliberately used editions available for free download at this invaluable site. Most Hasidic texts cited here can also be found in the searchable electronic database *The Responsa Project*, published by Bar-Ilan University in various versions on- and off- line.

יג. אם מתאוה לאיזה עבירה, אז יאמר הפסוקים של העבירה ההיא בטעמים ובנקודות בדחילו ורחימו, ואז תלך ממנו. יד. ואם לאיזה מדה רעה מתאוה ח"ו, אזי יאמר הששה עמים הכנעני וגו', בכל כוחו בדחילו ורחימו ומסתלק ממנו...²

If you desire [to commit] some sin, then say the verses [forbidding] that sin, with their melody and vowels, in awe and love, and that desire will depart. And if you desire some bad trait, heaven forbid, then say the six peoples, "the Canaanite..."³ with all your strength, in awe and love, and [the desire] will leave you.

The biblical verses listing these nations refer to the gift of the land of Canaan to Abraham's descendants. The Torah, of course, promises and commands that the Israelites will receive the gift of the land through genocidal warfare. Those Canaanite nations are to be utterly destroyed – men, women, and children (as stated most clearly in Deuteronomy 7:1-2, 20:16-17, and assumed through most of Joshua). Evidently, these Hasidic practices are not based on a literal understanding of those passages; rather, the land is a state of holiness or spiritual well-being, and the enemy nations are bad traits that need to be overcome to get there. Perhaps these teachers deliberately did not use Deuteronomy 7:1, which lists all seven nations in Rebbe Elimelech's list but in a different order, because its context is explicitly about physical destruction.

A generation after Rebbe Elimelech, another great Polish rebbe, Jacob Isaac, the Seer of Lublin (1745-1815), wrote that there was a tradition in the name of the Baal Shem Tov that the seven Canaanite nations, in the same order as in Rebbe Elimelech's teaching, corresponded to the seven lower sefirot of the Kabbalah:

...שמעתי בשם הרב איש אלקים מו"ה ישראל בעש"ט דכל הז' אומות שבא"י הם נגד הז' מדות זה לעומת זה למשל נגד מדות החסד הוא כנען תאוה אחרת וכן חתי כנגד פחד יצחק וכן כולם.⁴

² ישעיה מינוב, צוואת הריב"ש יג-יד (עמוד 1).

³ The edition consulted adds in square brackets "[the Hittite]" suggesting the same order as in R' Elimelech's teaching.

⁴ יעקב יצחק מלובלין, זאת זכרון, עמוד קמב, ד"ה וכן שמעתי בשם הרב המגיד. This passage is cited in שמעון מנחם מענדיל גאווארטשאב, ספר בעל שם טוב, שמות יא, giving its sources (from a different edition of זאת זכרון) as אמור דף ל"ה ע"ב, שלח דף כ"ו ע"א, בלק דף ל"ט (זאת זכרון) ע"א.

I heard in the name of the godly Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov that all the seven nations in the land of Israel correspond to the seven qualities (*midot*), one corresponding to the other. For example, the contrary of *Ḥesed* is Canaan, alien desire; and the Hittite is the contrary of the Fear of Isaac [*Gevurah*], and so on for all of them.⁵

This tradition ascribed to the Baal Shem Tov could in fact be a variation on, or an interpretation of, Rebbe Elimelech's advice in the *Tsetl Kotn*, based on his use of the key word *מדות* *midot* and the conventional number seven. In the Hasidic lexicon, *midot* means not only human traits but also the kabbalistic sefirot. In Kabbalah, the sefirot are aspects of the divine; from early on, however, Hasidism sees them – especially the seven “lower” ones, more easily translatable into human qualities – as present in the individual Jewish soul as much as in the divine realm.⁶ This shift in emphasis is part of what C.S. Lewis described as “that great movement of internalisation, and that consequent aggrandisement of man and desiccation of the outer universe, in which the psychological history of the West has so largely consisted.”⁷ Each of the holy sefirot has its demonic counterpart, and in the Jewish soul these are negative traits of character that need to be overcome. These are what the Canaanite nations correspond to.

The Seer of Lublin seems to have worked out the specifics of the correspondence himself. Taking the Canaanite nations in the same order as Rebbe Elimelech, and the seven sefirot in their standard order from *Ḥesed* to *Malkhut*, he provides reasons, mostly based on Hebrew puns, for each correspondence.⁸ (He does not refer to the specific bad traits mentioned by Rebbe Elimelech, which do not match up in any obvious way with the sefirot – an indication that in spite of the similarities and likely connection, his teaching is not based on the *Tsetl Kotn* directly.)

The Seer of Lublin passed this form of the teaching on to his disciple, Rebbe Tzvi Elimelech of Dinov, known as the Bnei Issachar, who mentions it in several of his books:

5 All seven are listed and their correspondence with the Sefirot explained in *זאת זכרון, עמוד ד"ה והנה זה שמעתי בשם הבעש"ט*.

6 See Norman Lamm, *The Religious Thought of Hasidism: Text and Commentary* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1999), 372, 375.

7 C.S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 42.

8 *זאת זכרון, עמוד ד"ה והנה זה שמעתי בשם הבעש"ט*. The puns and word associations are not readily translatable; see the original text, available as a free pdf download at <<http://hebrewbooks.org/3625>>.

והנה מקובל אצלנו שהז' עממין שהיו בארץ ישראל שצוה הש"י להכרית את שמם, הם היו נגד הז' מדות שבקליפה, וקבלתי סדרן והוראות שמותיהן מפה קדוש כבוד אדמו"ר הרב הק' פום ממלל ברבבין בוצינא דנהורא כק"ש מו"ה יעקב יצחק הלוי מלובלין זצלה"ה וזה סדרן...⁹

Now it is accepted among us that the seven peoples who were in the Land of Israel, about whom God commanded that their names be cut off, corresponded to the seven *midot* in the *qelipah* [the “shell” of unholiness or demonic power]. And I received their order and the meanings of their names from the holy mouth of my master and teacher.... Rebbe Jacob Isaac HaLevi of Lublin, of holy and blessed memory.

The Bnei Issachar finds a proof text for the overall notion that there is such a correspondence: in the book of Numbers, when Moses sends spies or scouts to explore the Promised Land, they report back (Numbers 13:32) that the inhabitants of the land are אנשי מדות *anshei midot*. Literally, this means “men of measure” or “people of great stature” – but the Bnei Issachar takes *midot* in its Kabbalistic sense:

וכל העם אשר ראינו בתוכה אנשי מדו"ת. רצ"ל כל אומה היא נגד מדה אחת שבקומת הס"א, הכנעני נגד מדת החסד דסט"א, החת"י גבורה, האמורי תפאר"ת, הפרזי" נצ"ח, החו"י הו"ד, היבוס"י יסו"ד, הגרגש"י מלכו"ת, אם כן גדלה מעלתם מאוד בקומת הס"א.¹⁰

“And all the folk that we saw in [the land] were people of *midot*” – meaning that each nation is the counterpart of one quality in the structure of the Other Side [סטרא אחרא, the demonic realm]: the Canaanite corresponding to Ḥesed of the Other Side, the Hivite to Gevurah, the Amorite to Tiferet, the Perizite to Netzah, the Hivite to Hod, the Jebusite to Yesod, the Girgashite to Malkhut, so that they are very exalted in the structure of the Other Side.

Having established this correspondence, the Seer of Lublin and his disciple do not use it as a spiritual/magical practice like Rebbe Elimelech. For them, it is a tool for biblical commentary, drawing out spiritual meaning from the text of the Torah. For example, the Seer of Lublin asks:

9 צבי אלימלך מדינוב, אגרא דכלה, כרך א', פרשת לך לך, דף פז, ד"ה (ו) ויעבר.

10 צבי אלימלך מדינוב, אגרא דכלה, כרך ב', פרשת שלח לך, דף רנח; ד"ה וכל.

דהנה א"י נקרא ארץ שבעה העממין וע"פ הרוב נקרא ארץ כנען מה זה הגם שהאמת הוא בפשיטות כי ז' עממין יצאו מכנען כמו שפירש"י ז"ל וגם זה צריך להעמיק למה כן...¹¹

The Land of Israel is called the land of the seven peoples, but mostly it is called the Land of Canaan. Why is this? Even though, indeed, the simple answer is that the seven peoples descended from Canaan, as Rashi explained, this too needs to be delved into; why is it so?

The answer to this question is provided concisely in another of his books:

... ע"כ נתן לו ארץ הכנעני. הגם שהיא ארץ שבעה עממים ופי' רש"י ז"ל ידוע וי"ל... כי עיקר המדות להיות האהבה רק לה' לא לשום ענין אחר וזה הוא מדת אברהם אוהבי וזה לעומת זה כי השבעה אומות נגד שבעה מדות מחסד ולמטה כן שמעתי בשם הרב ר' ישראל בעש"ט וכמו שהקדושה כולם יצאו מאברהם כי מדתו שורש כל טוב כן להיפך להבדיל יצאו כולם מכנעני ומרומז באהבה רעה ובתאות (רעות)...¹²

So He gave [Abraham] "the land of Canaan," though it is the land of the seven peoples, and the interpretation of Rashi, of blessed memory, is known. It can be said ... that the essence of the *midot* is for love to be only for God, not for anything else. This is the quality of "Abraham who loves Me" [Isaiah 41:8]. And on the other hand, the seven nations correspond to the seven *midot* from *Hesed* downwards; so I heard in the name of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov. And as [in] holiness everything emerged from Abraham, for his quality [*Hesed*] is the root of all good, so – on the contrary and on the other hand – [in evil] everything emerged from the Canaanite, which alludes to evil love and evil desires.

The same passage explains a nuance in the Torah's wording regarding the inhabitants of the Land in the time of Abraham:

ע"כ כשבא א"א ע"ה לא"י נאמר והכנעני אז בארץ... ובשעת המריבה עם רועיו של לוט נאמר והכנעני והפריזי אז יושב בארץ יש שינוי בכאן לשון יושב וגם הפריזי מוסיף ולפי הנ"ל ניחא כי הפריזי מרומז בנצח רע שרוצה דוקא לנצח את תבירו ומזה בא מריבה: וזה והכנעני והפריזי אז יושב כו' ע"י מריבה חלילה מתגבר ויש להם ישיבה. והכנעני כנ"ל כי הכל ממנו ע"י תאוה רעה שאינה רק לה' לבד.¹³

¹¹ יעקב יצחק מלובלין, זאת זכרון, עמוד קב, ד"ה פי' ע"פ בפ' שלח.

¹² יעקב יצחק מלובלין, דברי אמת, פרשת תצוה, עמוד 38, ד"ה איתא.

¹³ יעקב יצחק מלובלין, דברי אמת, פרשת תצוה, עמוד 38, ד"ה איתא.

So, when our father Abraham (peace be upon him) came to the Land of Israel, it says, "The Canaanite was then in the land" [Genesis 12:6] ... But at the time of the conflict with Lot's shepherds, it says, "the Canaanite and the Perizite were then dwelling in the land" [Genesis 13:7]. Why this change, with the word "dwelling" and the addition of the Perizite? According to what we have said, it makes sense. For the Perizite alludes to evil Netzah, wanting victory (נצח *netzah*) over one's fellow, and this is what conflict comes from. So "the Canaanite and the Perizite were then dwelling," for conflict – may it be averted! – strengthens them and gives them a "dwelling" [rather than temporary passage]. And the Canaanite is mentioned because of being the source of everything, through evil desires that are not for God alone.

Another question arises in Genesis 15:19-21, where Abraham is promised the land of ten nations rather than seven, "the Kenite, the Kenizite, the Kadmonite, the Hittite, the Perizite, the Rephaim, the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Gergashite, and the Jebusite." The Bnei Issachar builds on the Seer of Lublin's teaching about the usual list of seven nations to suggest that here, the first three are the evil counterparts of the highest three sefirot. As with the lower seven, he backs up the correspondence with Hebrew wordplay. The counterpart of Binah is the Kenite, related to קן, "nest," because in the imagery of the sefirot, Binah is the mother. In ascending order, Hokhmah corresponds to the Kenizite, because holy Hokhmah is called the elder, זקן, and the name Kenizite includes a permutation of those letters. And Keter, the beginning of everything, corresponds to the Kadmonite, a name meaning the earliest or first. The Midrash (Genesis Rabbah 44:23) states that these three nations were not displaced by the Israelites, but will be in time to come; this foretells the conquest of all the *midot* of evil when the earth is filled with spiritual knowledge.¹⁴

The Bnei Issachar then tackles the fact that the seven more familiar nations (the Rephaim, he explains, are the same as the Hivites in this context) appear here in a different order from the one his teacher taught him. He explains that these particular verses are a kind of instruction manual for the conquest of evil step by step:

ונ"ל דהנה בהיות שהגיע הזמן לנצח הז' קליפות, בתחילה צריך לנצח בחינת הגיבור ד' הרוצה להתגבר על הקדושה, והוא הנקרא חת"י כנ"ל, וגם בחינת הנצ"ח הרוצה לנצח הקדושה ח"ו, והוא הנקרא פריז"י כנ"ל, וגם בחינת ההו"ד שהוא ענף הגבורה, והיא בחינת החו"י הוא הרפאים שבכאן, ואחר כך בחינת התפארת שיש בו בחינת

14 צבי אלימלך מדינוב, אגרא דכלה (כרך א) פרשת לך לך, דף קא; ד"ה את הקני וכו'.

גבור כנודע... שהוא אמר"; צריך לבטלו... ואחר כך מבטלים תענוגי האהבות שהוא
החסד דקליפות, שהוא סוד כנענ"י כנ"ל, ואחר כך יתפרדו כל פועלי און דהיינו
גרגש"י יבוס", שהוא סוד יסו"ד מלכות דס"א, וזכר מקודם גרגש"י שהוא המלכות,
כי כן הוא בקליפה נוקבא קודמת לדכורא.¹⁵

And it seems to me that when the time comes to vanquish the seven *qelipot* ["shells" of unholiness or demonic power], to begin with, one must conquer the aspect of the warrior who wants to overpower holiness, and this is called the Hittite [corresponding to Gevurah, power]; and also the aspect of Netzah which wants victory [נצח] over holiness, heaven forbid, which is called the Perizite; and also the aspect of Hod, which is a branch of Gevurah, which is the aspect of the Hivites, the Rephaim of this verse. After that, one must nullify the aspect of Tiferet, which includes an aspect of the warrior, as is known, which is the Amorite ... After that, we nullify the pleasures of loves, which are the H̱esed of the *qelipot*, the mystery of the Canaanite. And after that, "all the workers of iniquity are scattered" [Psalm 92:8], namely the Girschite and Jebusite, the mystery of Yesod and Malkhut of the Other Side. It mentions the Girschite, which is Malkhut [often characterized as feminine] first, because in the *qelipah*, female takes precedence over male.

He goes on to discuss how these bad qualities can be overcome through humility and self-restraint. As in the teachings above, the point of this interpretation of biblical narrative is to provide direction for spiritual life.

In these passages and others from the Seer of Lublin and his disciple, the struggle against the seven nations is understood as an internal spiritual struggle against one's own bad traits, just as in Rebbe Elimelech's advice to recite the names of those nations.

The Hasidic classics I have been quoting from are all in print and read by Hasidic Jews today. A search of more recent Hasidic literature would find further examples of this idea, such as the following passage, in Yiddish, from the late Tosher Rebbe (Meshulam Feish Segal Löwy, 1921-2015), an outstanding representative of Hasidism in Canada:¹⁶

¹⁵ צבי אלימלך מדינוב, אגרא דכלה (כרך א) פרשת לך לך, דף קב., ד"ה סידורן.

¹⁶ On this rebbe and his books, see Justin Jaron Lewis and William Shaffir, "Tosh, Between Earth and Moon: A Hasidic Rebbe's Followers and his Teachings," in *From Antiquity to the Post-Modern World: Contemporary Jewish Studies in Canada*, eds. Daniel Maoz and Andrea Gondos, (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 137-169.

דער מדרש זאגט אין די פרשה פון ברית בין הבתרים (ב"ר מ"ד כ"ד), אז דער איי-בערשטער האט געוויזן פאר אברהם אבינו דעם גיהנם און שיעבוד מלכיות, און ער האט אים געפרעגט במה אתה רוצה שירדו בניך בגיהנם או במלכיות וכו', וברר לו אברהם את המלכיות. זאגן די ספרים פשט אז שיעבוד מלכיות מיינט דער שיעבוד פון די ז' אומות, הכנעני החתי והאמורי הפריזי החייו היבوسی והגרשני, דאס זענען די זיבן כחות הקליפה וואס זענען זיך מתלבש אין די ז' מדות פונעם מענטש, און רעדן אים איין אז ער זאל ניצן זיינע מדות אויף שלעכטס, האט דער אייבערשטער געזאגט פאר אברהם אבינו, אז די יודן וועלן מוזן אויסלייטערן ייזער חומר, אדער דורך שיעבוד מלכיות, דאס הייסט דורך דעם וואס זיי וועלן האבן נסיונות אויף די ז' מדות, און זיי וועלן דאס דורכברעכן און מכניע זיין די זיבן מדות רעות, אזוי וועלן זיי ווערן אויסגעלייטערט...¹⁷

The Midrash says on the Covenant Between the Pieces (Genesis Rabbah 44:24 [on Genesis 15:7-21]) that God showed Father Abraham gehenna and the kingdoms' subjugation, and asked him, "Into which do you want your children to descend – gehenna or the kingdoms?" And Abraham chose the kingdoms. The holy books explain that the kingdoms' subjugation means the subjugation of [rather than by] the seven nations: the Canaanite, the Hittite, and the Amorite, the Perizite, the Hivite, the Jebusite and the Girgashite. These are the seven powers of the *qelipah*, which garb themselves in a person's seven traits (*midot*), and talk us into using our traits for evil. God told Father Abraham that the Jews would have to purify their material beings. This could be through the kingdoms' subjugation – that is, [the Jews] would experience temptation in their seven traits, and break through it and humble the seven bad traits, and thus be purified.

Again, a literal reading of the Torah and the book of Joshua tells us that the seven Canaanite nations were to be exterminated – although we also see in Joshua, Judges, and Kings that a total extermination never happened. Down through the centuries, rabbis, notably the great Maimonides in his Laws of War, have taken this command very seriously. Their discussions and codifications somewhat mitigate the impression that the Torah calls for ruthless genocide, but they do not negate it altogether. Thus Maimonides codifies as law, and reads back into history, that all the Canaanite nations were offered terms of surrender and their lives would have been spared had they accepted

17 משולם פייש סג"ל לוי מטאהש, אמרות קודש א, פרשת זכור, עמ' רמז-רמח.

them.¹⁸ But he also rules that when any of these nations did not flee or surrender, every one of its members was to be killed.¹⁹

In both academic and popular realms it is easy to find discussions of how morally repugnant these genocidal passages are. Quite a few of these discussions, whether or not they are overtly anti-Jewish, take up the anti-Semitic trope of the “Old Testament God” – allegedly much more cruel than the “New Testament God,” who merely condemns most of the world to an eternal fiery hell for their sins or lack of faith. Militant atheists consider the genocidal texts to be representative of religion as a whole.²⁰ But within the world of religious Judaism, too, there is distress about the destruction of the Canaanites.²¹ In this context, the Hasidic spiritualization of the war on the Canaanites is a breath of fresh air in its non-violent non-literalism.

This approach is not without precedent, however. While the specific formulation, seven Canaanite nations as seven bad qualities or spiritual forces, is particular to early Hasidism, it draws on earlier motifs in Jewish thought.

One of these longstanding motifs is the interpretation of biblical passages about warfare as allegories of internal struggle. An early Jewish example is in the Talmud, Nedarim 32b, where the attack on a city described in Ecclesiastes 9:14 is read as an allegory of the attack of the “evil urge” (יצר הרע) on a human being. Apparently Jewish interpreters “had no doubt whatever” that this verse in Ecclesiastes “was allegorical in nature.”²²

The five books of the Torah, unlike the book of Ecclesiastes, have usually been seen as recounting history and laying down law. Nevertheless, the Zohar explains the legal passage beginning, “When you go out to war against your enemy” (Deuteronomy 21:10) on the basis that the enemy is the “evil urge.” The same passage is interpreted along similar lines, with the enemy as the evil urge, the Other Side, *qelipot*, and so on, by commentators influenced by Kabbalah, including Rabbi Abraham Saba (צרור המור) (15th century), Alsheikh (16th cen-

18 Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings and Wars, 6:1, 7-9.

19 Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings and Wars, 6:6.

20 I have not listed sources for these observations about discussions of the genocidal passages in the Torah, since they can be confirmed by a simple internet search.

21 A recent compilation of thoughtful Jewish scholarship on this motif in Jewish tradition and history is Katell Berthelot, Joseph E. David, and Marc G. Hirshman, *The Gift of the Land and the Fate of the Canaanites in Jewish Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). See also the discussions of this issue from deliberately divergent perspectives in Robert Eisen, *The Peace and Violence of Judaism: From the Bible to Modern Zionism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

22 “Allegory,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, first edition, 2:643.

tury), and the Or haHayim (18th century),²³ and by several early Hasidic teachers.²⁴

Also found in Jewish sources is the idea that the Canaanites symbolize the evil urge, bad thoughts, and the like. The Hasidic teaching focused on the names of seven nations is a more specific development of this general motif. For example, in the Zohar, the beginning of the story of Abraham is read allegorically: Abraham is the soul; the Canaanite who “was then in the land” is the evil urge.²⁵ The first printed Hasidic book, *Toledot Yaaqov Yosef*, includes a long passage on the laws of purchasing a Canaanite slave which explains that the Canaanite is the evil urge which is sometimes enslaved to holiness, as it should be, but sometimes gains mastery.²⁶

Preceding all these texts and blending several of these motifs together, Philo of Alexandria (1st century CE), while not denying the historicity of the biblical laws and narratives,²⁷ mostly reads biblical references to the conquest of the Land allegorically. “The Promised Land symbolizes Wisdom and Virtue,” the Canaanites the obstacles to achieving it.²⁸ Though Philo scarcely influenced Rabbinic tradition, his approach resembles that of the Hasidic teachings we are looking at.

Beyond these Jewish precedents, this hermeneutic has a long history in Christianity. Notably, Origen, the great and controversial Christian theologian of the early third century, “pointed out that some events in Scripture were physically impossible, as the existence of morning and evening before the sun

23 These texts can be found in the Bar-Ilan Responsa Project through a search of the commentaries on Deuteronomy 21:10 (כי תצא).

24 יעקב יוסף מפולנא, תולדות יעקב יוסף (כרך א), פרשת בחקותי, ד"ה ומ"ש לפניכם, עמ' תלד. דוב בער ממיזעריטש, מגיד דבריו ליעקב, רמזי תורה, פרשת כי תצא, ד"ה כי תצא, דף נה.: נחמן מברסלב, לקוטי מוהר"ן א:קז.

25 Zohar I:80a, *Sitrei Torah*.

26 יעקב יוסף מפולנא, תולדות יעקב יוסף (כרך א) פרשת משפטים, מצות קניית עבד כנעני, עמ' רטו-ריח.

27 This is a major point of Katell Berthelot, “Philo of Alexandria and the Conquest of Canaan,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 38, no. 1 (2007): 39-56, especially 49-52.

28 Berthelot, “Philo of Alexandria and the Conquest of Canaan,” citing Philo, *Migr.* 28 and 151; *Her.* 293, 313-315; *Somn.* 2.255. Philo also offered an “interpretation of the [genocidal] war against Amalek [Exodus 17:8-16, Deuteronomy 25:17-19] as a struggle against the passions.” (Paul R. Kolbet, “Torture and Origen’s Hermeneutics of Nonviolence,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 76, no. 3 (2008): 559 n.7, citing Philo, *Legum allegoriae* 3.186-187; *De migratione Abrahami* 143-144; *De congressu eruditionis gratia* 54-56.) Later Jewish understandings of Amalek, including spiritualized understandings of this conflict, are a topic in their own right.

... Some were morally impossible, as ... the Jewish wars of extermination.”²⁹ Going further than Philo by specifically rejecting a literal interpretation of Joshua’s wars against the Canaanites, he taught, “Within us (*intra nos*), indeed, are all those breeds of vices that continually attack the soul. Within us are the Canaanites; within us are the Perizzites; here are the Jebusites.”³⁰ This is like a précis of the Hasidic texts we have been looking at.

Do the Hasidic interpretations of the struggle with the Canaanite nations go as far as Origen, however, in developing a hermeneutic that rejects genocidal violence? Not as far as we might wish.

First of all, in some contexts, our Hasidic authors, while working with their correspondence between Canaanite nations and sefirot, do read the ancient conflict with the Canaanites as historical and relevant to the external world. In the Talmud, Megillah 11a, Rav Nahman son of Isaac quotes the beginning of Psalm 124, “Had the Eternal not been with us ... when a man arose against us” and comments, referring to Haman, “a man, and not a king.” The Bnei Issachar explains:

וקבלתי מפה קדשו אדומ"ו הרב הקדוש מ' יע"צ זקוצ"ל מנוחת כבודו בלובלין, דלבעבור זה הגרגשי עמד ופנה מפני ישראל כי אלו הו' עממין הם נגד חג"ת נהי"ם דסטרא אחרא, והגרגשי שהוא בחינת מלכות דס"א ... עמד ופנה מפני ישראל כי נפל עליו מורא מלכות דקדושה, עד כאן דברי קדשו, והוא כדברינו ממש, כי בקום עלינו מלך בקל יותר תפול עליו מורא ופחד... מה שאין כן בקום אדם ולא מלך שאין בו שום ניצוץ מורא מלכות.³¹

I heard from the holy mouth of my master and teacher the holy Rabbi Jacob Isaac of holy and blessed memory, whose honoured resting place is in Lublin, that this is why the Girgashite arose and left before the Israelites. For those seven nations correspond to Ḥesed, Gevurah, Tiferet, Netzah, Hod, Yesod, and Malkhut of the Other Side. And the Girgashite, who is the aspect of Malkhut of the Other Side ... arose and left before the Israelites, because the awe of the holy Malkhut befell him. Thus far the holy words [of the Seer of Lublin]. And this is exactly what we are saying: When a king rises against us, it is easy for awe and fear to befall him [and

29 R.H. Snape, “Rabbinical and Early Christian Ethics,” in *A Rabbinic Anthology*, ed. C.G. Montefiore and H.M.J. Loewe (New York: Schocken, 1974), 620.

30 Paul R. Kolbet, “Torture and Origen’s Hermeneutics of Nonviolence,” 560, citing Origen, *Hom. Jes. Nav.* 1.7 (Koetschau et al. [1899-1955]: 30.294.28-295.5).

31 צבי אלימלך מדינוב, בני יששכר, חלק ב', מאמרי חדשי בסלו טבת, ד:עט, ד"ה ומטאים, דף צו:

restrain him], which is not the case when “a man, not a king,” rises against us, for he has no spark of the awe of Malkhut in him.

To elucidate: The word מלכות Malkhut connotes kingship, dominion, sovereignty. Malkhut in Kabbalah is the Shekhinah, the divine presence manifesting God's sovereignty in the world. There is also evil Malkhut, the demonic counterpart of this divine quality; but evil Malkhut recognizes its own subservience to the divine Malkhut, the sovereignty of the God of Israel. Therefore the Gurgashites, embodiments of evil Malkhut, were overcome by the awe of holy Malkhut, and made way for the people of the sovereign God. Similarly, any king, even the most oppressive, partakes of the aspect of kingship, Malkhut, and must have an instinctive recognition of divine sovereignty which can easily be awakened in him. This reinforces the longstanding Jewish political view that Jews are better off under the rule of Gentile kings than in situations of potential mob rule.³² So the equation of the Gurgashite with Malkhut is not only relevant to internal struggles. It helps to explain biblical history, and it relates to the political experience of the Jewish people in a Gentile-dominated world.

Thus the Hasidic masters do not, like Origen, see the war on the Canaanites as exclusively internal. It is just that, like Philo, they are mostly interested in the spiritual implications of the Torah, and they usually see this relevance in terms of internal struggle. As the late Toshiyoshi Rebbe frequently remarks:

די תורה הקדושה איז דאך א נצחית, די אלע פרשיות זענען דאך נוגע לכל אדם ולכן זמן, דארף מען פארשטיין וואס איז די תורה הקדושה דא מרמז פאר אונז.³³

After all, the holy Torah is eternal. Every chapter is relevant to every person at any time. So we must understand what the holy Torah is hinting at here for us.

It also needs to be acknowledged that the typical Hasidic view of flesh-and-blood Gentiles – even those of our own time, and how much more so the biblical enemies – sees them as, essentially, a different species from Jews, and

32 See Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Servants of kings and not servants of servants: some aspects of the political history of the Jews* (Atlanta, Georgia: Emory University, 2005).

33 משולם פייש סג"ל לוי מטאהש, אמרות קודש א, פרשת תולדות, עמ' סז are scattered throughout his books.

aligned with unholy forces.³⁴ I found a counterpart to the Hasidic outlook on the Canaanite tribes in a recent teaching posted on the internet by a Christian author with a generally Pentecostal approach:

The conquest of the Promised Land is a type or “symbolic template” of all the promises of God for believers in Christ. Their promised land was physical; our promised land is spiritual. Their battle was against seven demon possessed nations that had to be conquered, “little by little”... Our battle is against the demonic powers that stand in the way of our promises being fulfilled. Our promised land, is our own nature.³⁵

Except for the reference to Christ, this is like the views of the Hasidic teachers quoted here: The actual historical Canaanite nations were demonic and had to be conquered. We fight the same struggle, against the same demonic powers, but within ourselves.

Thus these Hasidic interpretations do not go as far politically as we might have hoped. It should be noted, however, that the Hasidic outlook I am describing normally does not lead to anti-Gentile violence, but to a resigned and pacifist attitude to life in a hostile world, where the only weapons appropriate for Jews today are prayer, humility, and Torah study.³⁶

These Hasidic teachings also lend themselves to a psychological critique. Rebbe Elimelech's *Tsetl Kotn*, the first published text of the ones I am focusing on, represents a very ascetic approach to spiritual life. Recurrently, it instructs the reader to visualize being burned alive as an act of martyrdom at the hands of non-Jews. You should do this during any idle moments, as well as before eating or sex, with the sincere intention that you would derive more pleasure from sacrificing your life in this way than from any physical pleasure.³⁷ In this context, we could see Rebbe Elimelech as translating the cruel warfare against the Canaanites into a cruel inner struggle, involving self-inflicted psychological

34 For a succinct summary and references to scholarship on this topic, see Tessa Satherley, “‘The Simple Jew’: The ‘Price Tag’ Phenomenon, Vigilantism, and Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh’s Political Kabbalah,” *Melilah* 10 (2013): 70–72.

35 Rusty Russell, “The Seven Nations of Canaan: Conclusion (Heart Message): ‘Take the Land Little by Little,’” Bible History online, <http://www.bible-history.com/map-israel-joshua/map-israel-joshua_conclusion.html>.

36 See, for example, David N. Myers, “‘Commanded War’: Three Chapters in the ‘Military’ History of Satmar Hasidism,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 81, no. 2 (2013): 313–315.

37 אלימלך מליזענסק, נועם אלימלך, צעטיל קטן א-ג.

violence. Similarly, how harsh is the Seer of Lublin's premise that one must not love anything but God!

Nevertheless, the Hasidic spiritualization or internalization of the conquest of the Canaanites is important and deserves to be more widely known. In today's context of religiously justified bloodshed in the Promised Land and elsewhere, these teachings open possibilities for a serious but non-warlike reading of the Bible's anti-Canaanite passages.

While notoriously argumentative, Jews do listen to what their rabbis, scholars and teachers tell them. Today, there are rabbis and scholars who apply Torah passages about the Canaanite nations of the Torah to today's Palestinians and other Arabs.³⁸ Even a prayer to be recited on Israel's independence day, promulgated by the Conservative Movement (not the "dreaded" Orthodox!) refers to Israel's enemies in that war as "seven peoples" (שבעה עממים), using the biblical term for the Canaanites who were to be exterminated.³⁹ This kind of rhetoric, of course, also provides fodder for enemies of the Jewish people.

In this context, it would make a positive difference if rabbis and scholars were teaching that the war with the Canaanites is there in the Torah to teach us about struggle with our own selfish and destructive qualities. Although the gist of this approach is available in Christian sources, the fact that the teachings discussed here come from revered early Hasidic masters and are expressed in the profoundly Jewish terms of Kabbalah makes them "kosher" and more likely to be heard and absorbed by Jewish listeners. These teachings could nourish Jewish commitments to non-violence, or to less violence, and become part of today's Jewish repertoire for thinking about biblical passages that are among the most troubling parts of our Scriptural heritage.

38 While it would be rare to find a rabbi explicitly identifying today's Palestinians as Canaanites – which is a claim made by Palestinian nationalists (see David Wenkel, "Palestinians, Jebusites, and Evangelicals," *Middle East Quarterly* [Summer 2007], 49-56) – biblical verses such as Deuteronomy 7:2-4, whose original context is the genocide command, are applied to them. See the 2010 halakhic pronouncement by Israeli rabbis forbidding Israeli Jews to sell or rent homes to Arabs, Iddo Tavory, "Israeli Rabbis' Letter," <<http://www.deliberatelyconsidered.com/2010/12/the-israeli-rabbis-letter-a-translation/>>. This rhetoric is rooted in halakhic sources' extension of some of the laws regarding Canaanites to idol-worshipping Gentiles in general (e.g. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Idolatry ch. 10), but extends them further to Muslim, Christian, or secular Palestinians.

39 על הניסים for Yom HaAtzmaut in Siddur Sim Shalom. Text is posted here <http://community.beliefnet.com/go/thread/view/43851/14394348/Yom_HaAtzmaut> and critiqued in the comments thread on ELF, "Liturgy for Yom Ha-Atzmaut," <<http://apikorsus.blogspot.ca/2006/05/liturgy-for-yom-ha-atzmaut.html>>.

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PART 4

Cinema



Moses in the Cave of Forgotten Dreams

Jennifer L. Koosed

Werner Herzog's *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* (2011) is not a movie about Moses.¹ It is not, in fact, a movie about the Bible at all. It is a documentary about what may be the earliest extant religious images, the paintings in the Chauvet Cave of southern France. Herzog's movie takes us into a meditation on what it means to create, to be religious, to be human. Since the caves remained active bear caves, since the hundreds of paintings are of animals, since a bear skull was set on a stone like an altar and positioned to face the opening, ultimately the meditation that Herzog invites us into is also on animality.

Moses is arguably the founder of the first, established monotheistic tradition, the religion of Israel: the liberator, the giver of the Law, and the builder of the nation. The story of Moses is also replete with animals. There is an undercurrent of animality in his birth narratives, he marries a "little bird" (Zipporah), almost all of the plagues are animals and/or affect animals (sometimes exclusively), and after destroying a golden calf, Moses becomes himself a golden calf when he descends the mountain horned and glowing, evoking the very animal he seeks to repress.²

The animals in all three of these narratives – the paintings in the cave, Herzog's documentary, and the Exodus story – are sites of the fantastic. Fantastic narratives "tell of unexpected, boundary-transgressive and inexplicable things, of alternative worlds, supernatural personae, and incredible events, of monsters, magic, miracles, marvels...."³ Whereas such narratives are entertaining and form popular genres of film and literature, they also function

1 I first met Francis Landy in 2000 at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Nashville, Tennessee. I was giving a paper and he made a comment that strengthened one of my points. The comment was both gracious and incisive. I also met George Aichele and Rob Seesengood at that same session. It was a most auspicious day.

2 Jennifer L. Koosed, "Moses: The Face of Fear," in *Affect Theory and the Bible*, eds. Jennifer L. Koosed and Stephen D. Moore, *Biblical Interpretation* 22 (2014): 414-429. In Exodus 34:29, after receiving the law a second time from God, Moses descends the mountain קרן עור פניו. The phrase is notoriously difficult to translate. In my article "Moses: The Face of Fear," I argue that there are associations between horns, light, and divinity throughout ancient Near Eastern iconography and that the confusion arises not from any mistranslation but from the strangeness of the image and the multivalency of the Hebrew itself.

3 Laura Feldt, *The Fantastic in Religious Narrative from Exodus to Elisha* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2012), 1.

in deeper ways that transcend any particular generic or cultural context. In particular, building on the theory of Renate Lachmann, Laura Feldt understands “the fantastic as a mode of discourse which explores alterity ... It is pervasive in all literature, ancient and modern, and evokes wonder, surprise, and the readjustment of categories.”⁴ Far from excluding the religious (as some fantasy theorists have argued based, in part, on assumptions about the nature of religious belief⁵), fantasy functions within religion and religious narratives in many complicated ways. Fantastic elements highlight how religion can be deeply disorienting, unsettling the believer (or reader or viewer) in order to produce transformative experiences. The Exodus narratives may be foundational, but they are neither firm nor fixed. Feldt argues that “the fantastic elements of these narratives confound central dichotomies – hope/horror, utopia/dystopia, benign/malign, natural/supernatural and self/other – and are portrayed as ambiguous and cognitively uncertain.”⁶ Reading Moses in the *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* adds another central dichotomy confounded in the Exodus narratives, the human/animal opposition. The history of religions has been posed as a history of movement from animism to theism; from fertility gods to gods of law and ethic. And yet, animism with all of its concomitant ideologies is not as opposed to theism as is often assumed; rather, it is constitutive of theism, included intimately even as it is publicly decried. All three of these texts take us to a place of wonder where the boundaries between the human and the animal are permeable, and where we ask profound questions about who we are and how we relate to the rest of the world.

The Dream Begins

The Chauvet Cave was discovered in southeastern France by three explorers in December 1994 (Eliette Brunel Deschamps, Jean-Marie Chauvet, and Christian Hillaire). Seeking to preserve the delicate environment, entry has been

4 Francis Landy, “Review of Laura Feldt’s *The Fantastic in Religious Narrative from Exodus to Elisha*,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 59 (2014): 474. For another review of Laura Feldt’s work see George Aichele’s review in *Religion and Literature* 45 (2013): 209–211. Aichele is more critical of Feldt’s reliance on Renate Lachmann at the expense of the fantasy theory of Tzvetan Todorov.

5 Feldt analyzes the understanding of religion in fantasy theory in *The Fantastic in Religious Narrative*, 3–4. See also George Aichele and Tina Pippin, “Introduction: Fantasy and the Bible,” in *Violence, Utopia and the Kingdom of God: Fantasy and Ideology in the Bible*, eds. George Aichele and Tina Pippin (New York: Routledge, 1998), 2–5.

6 Feldt, *The Fantastic in Religious Narratives*, 6.

carefully controlled as scholars document and study the paintings and other artifacts scattered across the floor of the cave. In 2010, the documentary film maker Werner Herzog was given brief access to the cave to film the paintings that lie therein. The paintings represent some of the earliest examples of art created by human hands, those of the Aurignacian people some 32,000 years ago. Until recent discoveries in Indonesia and better dating technologies of these discoveries,⁷ they were the oldest extent examples of human art, and they fit a larger culture of artistic representation found throughout Europe. Iconography throughout Europe is fairly consistent and therefore may indicate a continuous culture that spanned not only geography but also chronology – a culture that lasted tens of thousands of years. Since much of this art is figurative and mythic, the cave of Chauvet may be evidence of a sacred tradition that also spanned tens of thousands of years, lasting longer than any of the current world religions, longer than the record of human history itself.⁸

Although Herzog's choice to create a documentary – the very epitome of the real in cinema – may at first belie any reading of the film as fantasy, Herzog signals the fantastic at several key points. Fantasies are not devoid of all reality; instead, fantasy emerges in the interpenetration of the real and the imaginary.⁹ Film has always played with the boundaries between the real and the imagined because film – even at its most realistic and transparent – is still artifice. In fact, documentary may do even more than other types of movies to transgress the boundaries between, and raise questions about, truth and representation.¹⁰ Herzog himself underscores the play by naming his documentary *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*. The idea of the dream is important to Herzog's project

7 The paintings at Chauvet were created in part with charcoal and therefore can be dated with carbon-14 dating technologies. Ancient artists also frequently used ochre – a form of iron oxide from the soil. Until recently, ochre paintings were impossible to date. Developing and then using a technique to date the rock under the ochre, archeologist and geochemist Maxime Aubert has determined that cave paintings in Indonesia are at least 35,400 years old. Aubert's discoveries disrupt a theory that art emerged first in Europe and then spread from Europe through cultural exchange. Instead, Aubert's work suggests that art emerged while all *homo sapiens* were still in Africa and then was carried around the world. Jo Marchant, "A Journey to the Oldest Cave Paintings in the World." *Smithsonian* (January 2016). Aubert's study was originally published in *Nature* in 2014.

8 Chauvet Cave alone appears to have two periods of habitation that span thousands of years: 37,000 to 33,500 years ago and 31,000 to 28,000 years ago.

9 Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Methuen, 1981), 20.

10 Robert Paul Seesengood, "Mysteries of the Bible (Documentary) Revealed," in *The Bible in Motion: A Handbook of the Bible and Its Reception in Film*, Part 1, ed. Rhonda Burnette-Bletsch (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 210-211.

because, according to Lutz Koepnick, “what is at the center of his inquiry is to expand cinema by activating the proto-cinematic aspects of dreams and parietal art.”¹¹ Herzog’s history of film, then, reaches back into the deep recesses of human history, into the deep crevices of caves, into the unplumbed depths of our unconscious. The Chauvet Cave paintings are positioned as both proto-cinema and dream space where the real and the imaginary mingle. Even more, the cave as a forgotten-dream space positions the past as neither knowable nor unknowable in the same way a dream can linger just beyond the point of consciousness, neither clearly remembered nor completely forgotten when the dreamer awakes.

Like the title, the form of the documentary is not incidental to its meaning. The conditions of filming the cave art were challenging, even more so since Herzog decided to film in 3D. Herzog and his crew were given only four hours a day for six days. Only a small group was permitted inside; they could bring only the equipment that they could carry; they could not use strong special lighting; they could not step off the narrow walk-way constructed by the researchers. Consequently, the viewer sees the work of production: the camera jostles, the microphone comes into view, Herzog and his camera men move in and out of the shots, sometimes not even trying to get out of the camera’s way. In other words, Herzog regularly breeches the “fourth wall.” Such limitations help to produce affective opportunities. Herzog uses film to document the art of the cave, but he also uses his film to re-create the physicality of the cave – what it feels like, looks like, sounds like, even smells like. The viewer feels as if she too is walking in the cave alongside Herzog and his men, invited to see and feel alongside the documentary crew. The challenges of filming in the cave, although complicating factors, are part of an exercise in what Koepnick calls “the art of embodied looking.”¹² Showing the seams of the film and involving the full body of the viewer also contributes to the evocation of the fantastic by transgressing boundaries and subverting audience’s expectations of the movie-going experience.

Another element of fantasy is the composite or the hybrid. Herzog is known for his quirky assemblages of images and ideas, as well as the insertion of his own self and subjectivity into the filmic process. *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* is classic Herzog. Along with fairly standard documentary footage – like interviews with the researchers while they stand inside the cave, or outside the cave, or in front of their computers – come detours and diversions: when one

11 Lutz Koepnick, “Herzog’s Cave: On Cinema’s Unclaimed Pasts and Forgotten Futures,” *The Germanic Review* 88 (2013): 273.

12 Koepnick, “Herzog’s Cave,” 272.

researcher mentions that he was not always an archaeologist but once a circus performer, Herzog pivots from questions about the cave to questions about the man's juggling past. Observations about the play of light and shadow on the cave wall breaks to clips of Fred Astaire's dance with his own shadow from the movie *Swing Time* (1936; the dance number is called "Bojangles of Harlem"). The movie ends not with a final shot of the cave but instead with albino crocodiles that swim in the shadow of a near-by nuclear reactor. "Rather than reinforcing a documentary truth claim, Herzog's subjective interventions" achieved through editing decisions, voice-over, and other distinctive aesthetic features "create an alternative narrative of questions and uncertainties."¹³ The form of the movie mimics the fragmentary and intense fantastical world of dreams and memory work. Ideas are built up, left and returned to; images flow then jump in ways that are not logical but self-referential and idiosyncratic.

In these ways, Herzog is also trying to mimic the effect of the cave. The morphology of the cave is also not incidental to the form and meaning of the work; the cave paintings themselves are also an exercise in "the art of embodied looking." Instead of only painting on flat, scraped surfaces, it seems as if the Paleolithic artists deliberately chose nooks and crevices, outcroppings and extrusions. They intentionally left the large and presumably well-lit entrance of the cave relatively devoid of images. You have to walk into the dark to see the animals. The animals painted seem to be emerging out of the rocks, an effect even more pronounced because of painting techniques that produce the illusion of movement (multiple legs, for example). Now, imagine not the clear steady light of electric lamps brought in by the scholars and filmmakers, but the flicker and fade of the fires and torches used to illuminate the paintings. As Herzog points out as he moves his lights back-and-forth over the surface of the rock, the total effect is one of a "proto-cinema." The experience of someone in the Paleolithic period walking into the cave may be like a contemporary person entering a darkened movie theatre, viewing the paintings like watching images flicker and flash across the screen.

Although not discussed in the film, there is some evidence to suggest that those who painted in caves chose areas that were more resonant to create their art. The acoustic properties of an area "contributed to setting a multisensory stage for altered states of consciousness."¹⁴ Perhaps drums, echoes, unseen animals, geological noises – all would contribute to the sensory experience of the caves and provide an answer to one of the great questions of Paleolithic art

13 Elif Akçali and Cüneyt Çakırlar, "A Form of Proto-Cinema: Aesthetics of Werner Herzog's Documentary Essayism," *CineAction* 97 (2016), 50.

14 Kospnick, "Herzog's Cave," 281.

– why enter into a space of almost complete sensory deprivation to paint? In this understanding, the paintings are in the darkest recesses not to erase sensory experience, but to create a subtle, profound and out-of-the ordinary sensory experience, perhaps to move the individual into a state of altered consciousness, a dream-like state of awe. At one point in the film, Herzog has his crew pause and listen to the beating of their own hearts: we, the audience, stays silent with them until a heartbeat emerges, then music begins moving in and out of the beating. In this way, Herzog gives a nod to what many believe was the music that filled the space – drum music – but does so without trying to reproduce some kind of “authentic” Paleolithic musical experience. Rather, Dutch avant-garde composer and cellist Ernst Reijseger created the soundtrack of the documentary. Reijseger’s music is ethereal and transcendent. It has a dissonance and a tonality that evokes both antiquity and futurity at the same time. Herzog knits together here and now with there and then, through ambient sound that echoes the sacred.

In an interview with *Archaeology* magazine, Herzog describes how, after earning the trust of the guards, he remained behind alone for five minutes in the cave and just experienced it. When asked, “What was it like in those five minutes?” he replies, “It is really awesome, absolutely awesome.”¹⁵ Herzog shifts the verb from the past to the present. The experience of the documentary is a collapse of temporality focalized in a feeling of awe, for, as Herzog remarks in the film, it is with this sense of wonder that “the cave transforms into an enchanted world of the imaginary where time and space lose their meaning.”

Magic, Marvels, and Fantastic Beasts

At first glance, the animals of Chauvet may seem to be representational; but by eschewing the well-lit flat surfaces in favor of the dark and undulating rock, creating illusions of movement and a three-dimensional effect, and producing an immersive bodily experience, the cave intermingles the real with the imaginary as the paintings almost come to life. Herzog attempts to convey these fantastical effects through his camera-work, drawing attention to how we can almost see the people as they create their paintings, hear the horses on the walls as they run and whinny. Herzog “wants us to relearn how to see with our senses and to sense our seeing. He invites viewers to experience cinema as

¹⁵ “Interview: Werner Herzog on the Birth of Art,” *Archaeology* 64 (March/April 2011).

both a past and a future site of fluid sensuous transactions and open-ended physical voyages.”¹⁶

The Bible calls out to be experienced in much the same way, as a fantastical text where the boundaries between the real and the imaginary blur, where chronology is confounded, a text that produces affective connections, and takes its reader on “open-ended physical voyages.” Francis Landy provocatively writes,

There is a book written by an alien intelligence, about a world imagined into being by that intelligence, populated with creatures, and in particular a celestial-terrestrial hybrid, who writes the book written by that intelligence, in which he finds himself imagined, conversed with, the subject of speculation, inquiry, hope and despair. He comes to save the world or to destroy it. It is full of possibilities, wild possibilities. It is our world, but seen through the eyes of that intelligence, seen through our eyes. It tells a story, a “super-story,” which never ends, despite its ceaseless desire for an ending.¹⁷

Looking specifically at Exodus, Landy references Laura Feldt’s work which “emphasizes the ambiguity and disruptive force of fantastic narrative, which results in disbelief and doubt ... and founds cultural memory on an experience of bewilderment. It introduces the dark as well as light side of God, and a sense that no one really knows what is happening.”¹⁸ In the Bible as a whole and Exodus in particular, the voyage the reader takes is sometimes a “long journey into death and exile”¹⁹ even as it also is a flight into freedom.

In her own words, Feldt argues, “Ambiguity, uncertainty, a confounding of distinctions, a pervasive emphasis on mutability, and the triggering of a search for meaning in the recipient are central to the work of the fantastic in the Exodus narrative.”²⁰ The fantastical elements of Exodus are in full display in the story of the plagues (Exodus 7-12).²¹ Animals play a crucial role as they are both the plagues themselves and the bodies upon which the plagues are enacted. Almost all of the plagues are animals (frogs, gnats, flies, locusts) or

16 Koepnick, “Herzog’s Cave,” 273.

17 Francis Landy, “Seers, Fictions and Other Worlds,” *JHebS* 16 (2016), 26.

18 Landy, “Seers, Fictions and Other Worlds,” 21.

19 Landy, “Seers, Fictions and Other Worlds,” 21.

20 Feldt, *The Fantastic in Religious Narrative*, 7.

21 Peter D. Miscall also reads the plague narratives as fantasy in “Biblical Narrative and Categories of the Fantastic,” in *Fantasy and the Bible*, ed. George Aichele and Tina Pippin, *Semeia* 60 (1992): 39-51.

effect animals (blood, gnats, boils, hail, death of the first born), sometimes exclusively (death of the livestock). Only the ninth plague (darkness) has no explicit animal component, although they would have been plunged into the dark as well. The fantastical is found both at the level of form and in content. The narrative is unclear, inconsistent, contradictory; hence, it is widely considered a composite text. Whereas the composite nature of Exodus 7-12 is usually read as evidence of multiple sources, compositeness is also an element of the fantastic.²² Just like Herzog's exposure of the work of production draws in the audience and creates affective opportunities, so too does the Exodus's obvious seams. Its own exposure of the work of production heightens the unsettling nature of the story, requires the reader's participation, and thus intensifies the affective registers.²³ The subject of the story is a horror show – bloody rivers, ponds and pools, piles of dead fish, a noxious odor (Ex 7:19-21); swarms of flies (Ex 8:21-22); skin suddenly erupting in festering boils (Ex 9:10); unending darkness (Ex 10:21-23); dead and decaying bodies all around (Ex 9:3-6; Ex 12:29). Some of the animals are killed off multiple times – the cattle, for example,²⁴ like a bovine Night of the Living Dead. Ordinary things become extraordinary – frogs, gnats, hail, locusts are all typical to the Egyptian landscape but morph to become terrifying plagues through fantastic excess.²⁵ The obvious logical inconsistencies further destabilize the reader's hold on reality. The plague narratives are an affective experience designed to evoke horror and wonder and awe.

As the plagues begin in blood, they end in blood as well. The final devastating plague – the death of the firstborn – is prefaced by the Israelite slaughtering of lambs and the painting of their doors with the animal's blood (Ex 12:3). The blood has a magical quality that protects the people from the supernatural threat of the “most prominent phantasm,” the Destroyer.²⁶ The blood of the lamb mediates the ethnic difference between Israelite and Egyptian, a difference that the plague narratives as a whole endeavor to establish. In these plagues, however, there is no clear dividing line between the human and the animal – animals are scattered across the narrative, taking every conceivable role and mediating every relationship. They are the plague; they suffer the plague; they are what saves one from the plague; they are saved from the

22 Feldt, *The Fantastic in Religious Narrative*, 94.

23 This paper was first presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in 2016. I would like to thank Jay Twomey for a comment that helped me clarify this point.

24 Feldt, *The Fantastic in Religious Narrative*, 99.

25 Feldt, *The Fantastic in Religious Narrative*, 100.

26 Feldt, *The Fantastic in Religious Narrative*, 102.

plague. Even though we approach the biblical text now with our own modernist notions of us and them, human and animal, these clear and bifurcated categories do not universally obtain. As Jacques Derrida points out the world of living creatures does not easily divide into just two. Rather, the distinctions among non-human animals are various and voluminous.²⁷ The distinction between an ant and an elephant is just as profound as the distinction between a man and an eagle. The line between Israelite and Egyptian may be clearly drawn during the plagues,²⁸ but the plague narratives break down any simple human-animal categorization; the binary is collapsed and then the categories multiplied.

One of the most striking aspects of the Chauvet Cave is the sheer volume of images. The cave contains about 420 pictures of animals. There is a great diversity of animal species, at least fourteen, and the emphasis is on large, dangerous, non-hunted animals.²⁹ In addition to the animals, there are almost five hundred big red dots (which are palm prints), full hand prints, and hand stencils. There are about forty-five figures classified as “signs” because they have no discernable human or animal component. There are five vulvas on the cave’s walls, four of which are isolated, one of which is a part of a much more complex and clearly fantastical figure, “an extraordinary female silhouette associated with a composite being.”³⁰

The figure occupies an outcropping in the farthest chamber, the deepest part of the cave. The image is of the lower portion of a woman’s body – stylized pubic triangle and legs, reminiscent of the Stone Age statutes often called Venus figures. Only a part of the lower half is visible because the painting wraps around the stone and the other side of the painting cannot be accessed. The figure is connected to a bison head with a human arm, and it is difficult to

27 Jacques Derrida, *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, ed. Marie Louise Mallet, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham, 2008), 31-34. See also Ken Stone’s use of Derrida to explore this idea in another passage in Exodus: “The Dogs of Exodus and the Question of the Animal,” in *Divinanimality: Animal Theory, Creaturely Theology*, ed. Stephen D. Moore (New York: Fordham Press, 2014), 36-50.

28 The plagues clearly mark Egyptian and Israelite, but the Exodus narrative as a whole struggles to do the same. Moses himself has a hybrid Hebrew-Egyptian identity as does the “mixed multitude” that leaves Egypt.

29 Rhinoceroses (65), felines (71), mammoths (66), horses (40), bison (31), aurochs (10), ibex (20), deer (25), bears (15), musk oxen (2).

30 Jean Clottes, *Chauvet Caves: The Art of Earliest Times* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah, 2003), 163. See also Jean-Marie Chauvet, Eliette Brunel Deschamps, and Christian Hillaire, *Dawn of Art: The Chauvet Cave: The Oldest Known Paintings in the World* (London: Harry N. Abrams, Inc, 1996).

tell if there is one figure or two. In *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*, Nicholas Conard, archaeologist at the University of Tübingen, notes that among the artifacts of the sapiens, there are “mythical depictions that clearly show that these people have a religious concept involving the transformation of humans into animals.” Animist beliefs appear to be the primary religious orientation of ancient humans. The central presupposition of animism is that there is no firm barrier between humans and other beings, and subsequently, there is no strict hierarchy between them.³¹ As Jean Clottes, the head of the team researching Chauvet describes later in the documentary, the two concepts of fluidity between all living things (plant, animal, human) and permeability between the spirit and the material world produce a radically different worldview than the one of most contemporary religion. With the agricultural revolution, animism gives way to theism. Theism avers that there is a “hierarchal relationship between humans and a small group of ethereal entities called gods,” goddesses, or just god.³² As monotheism in particular develops, divinity is further stripped of its connections with other creatures as the human takes center stage. In Exodus and Deuteronomy, the first two commandments demand exclusive worship and forbid the creation of images, both of which work together to produce a deity strangely devoid of the animal – at least in the standard historical approach to the Bible and the history of religions.

In fact, a common way of reading the animals’ role in the plagues is to read them as a sign of the repudiation of Egyptian polytheism, a polytheism that incorporates animals in a variety of ways, including hybrid animal-human divinities.³³ The plagues are the culmination of Moses’s contest with Pharaoh, both men representing the power of their own respective deities. The triumph of Yahweh is the triumph of monotheism over polytheism, aniconic over iconic, spirit over human-animal-divine hybridity. But sitting in Chauvet Cave looking at the paintings and reading the accounts of the plagues, other more complicated interpretations emerge. Bringing together affect theory with post-humanism, Donovan Schaeffer argues that religion “is best understood neither as exclusively cognitive nor as exclusively human.”³⁴ Schaefer’s fundamental point is that animals are not outside of the religious; in this case, they are not,

31 Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2015), 54.

32 Harari, *Sapiens*, 55.

33 See for example, Ziony Zevit, “Three Ways to Look at the Ten Plagues,” *Bible Review* 6 (1990): 16-23, 42, 44.

34 Donovan O. Schaeffer, *Religious Affects: Animality, Evolution, and Power* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 6.

then, incidental to the narrative. They are not just a plot device to move the Israelites out of Egypt and into the Promised Land, and a means of demonstrating Yahweh's supremacy. Instead, they are an integral part of the circulation of power. "Religion, like other forms of power, moves bodies by creating affective ligatures between bodies and their world."³⁵ The caves created an embodied, affective experience for the Paleolithic people – the feel of the rock, the sound of the drum, the smell of the bear, the sight of the animal figures on the wall. The plague narratives are affective experiences as well – the smell of the blood, the sound of the frogs, the pain of boils, lurching and lowing cattle, the heartbreak of death. In each, bodies are linked to bodies, power is circulated, producing both division and connection, reconfiguring relationship. Instead of seeing religion as the wedge, Schaefer actually uses religion to bind (*re-ligare*) all of our animal bodies together.

Yuval Noah Harari also challenges many of the standard understandings of religion when he argues that "monotheism, as it has played out in history, is a kaleidoscope of monotheist, dualist, polytheist and animist legacies, jumbling together under a single divine umbrella." This kaleidoscope is called syncretism. He continues: "Syncretism might, in fact, be the single great world religion."³⁶ The story of the plagues does not repudiate, reject or exclude animism or an animal-infused polytheism; the story of the plagues gathers the animals up and through them and with them establishes the kaleidoscope called Israelite religion, and then the religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam that follow. They are all composite religions infused with animals that share a common prophet, most strikingly imaged as horned and glowing. Transformed after the plagues by contact with God, Moses becomes an animal-divine-human hybrid (Ex 34:29), the animist at the heart of monotheism.

What makes us human? What divides us from other animals? Herzog pursues these questions and different researchers provide different responses. Jean Clottes disavows the idea that we are human because we are "wise" (*sapiens*). What do we know? We know nothing. For Clottes, Chauvet teaches that we are human because we are spiritual beings. Another researcher, Jean-Michel Geneste, locates our humanity in the emergence of figuration. The human drive to communicate and to inscribe a memory on something that will live on – bone, rock, the wall of a cave – in order to speak to the future. The figure, he avers, is a way to communicate that is even better than language. These understandings about what makes us different from the other animals are interrelated: in the very moment that we are emerging out of other

35 Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, 179.

36 Harari, *Sapiens*, 223.

animals, in the very ways in which we are distinguishing ourselves from other animals, we do not simply leave the animal behind. In both the cave and in Exodus, the animals are sites of the fantastic and the fantastic plays a critical role in the production of memory. One function of fantasy is compensatory – the fantastic is concerned with that which is repressed or forgotten in a culture.³⁷ In Exodus, the fantastic strategies create a liminal situation, and it is this liminal situation that the Israelites are enjoined to remember as their foundational experience. Feldt states, “They have to *remember* a common fantasy, a dream ... this paradoxically means that they are required to remember their own liminality, their own always-coming-from-somewhere-else quality, the unstable center of their identity, the first, basic erection of difference, the first establishment of distinction, for this identity.”³⁸ What dreams are forgotten, what memories repressed?

Animals dream. We dream of animals. While speaking to Herzog in what is formally a fairly typical documentary shot – director off camera asking questions, expert on camera answering them – Julian Monney, one of the archeologists working on the Chauvet Cave, unexpectedly veers off into a reflection about the “emotional shock” he experienced every day he entered the caves.³⁹ During the day, he would enter the caves to work, explore, and document. At night, the caves would enter into him. He dreamt of lions – real lions and paintings of lions. Herzog asks if he were afraid. No. “It was more a feeling of powerful things and deep things a way to understand things which was not a direct way.” The effect was so profound, Monney had to suspend his research, stop going into the cave, to allow the effecting and affective registers to settle. Our Paleolithic ancestors wanted to tell us something. They wanted to tell us: animals.

Moses and the Crocodiles

The most puzzling scene of Herzog’s documentary is not filmed within the cave, nor is it part of the film proper. A camera on a drone circles around Herzog and his crew as they stand outside of the cave, next to the river, below the magnificent stone bridge that spans it. The viewer sees through the lens of

37 Both Lachmann and Jackson discuss the compensatory function of fantasy. See Feldt, *The Fantastic in Religious Narrative*, 63–64.

38 Feldt, *The Fantastic in Religious Narrative*, 168.

39 In discussing Monney’s circus past, Herzog mentions lions. This word then opens up a memory for Monney and he begins to talk about his dreams of lions.

the camera, as if she too is flying over the stunningly beautiful scenery, then swooping down to the crew standing amidst the trees on the bank. A man reaches up and grabs the drone; he turns the camera off, his chest and hands briefly fill the screen before everything goes dark. The postscript begins.

When the lights come back up, the camera has already taken the viewer up the Rhône River to one of the largest nuclear power plants in France, located about twenty miles from Chauvet Cave. Outside the power plant, fed by the excess water used to cool the reactors, is a great green-house in which has been created a tropical biosphere. The camera enters into this lush space and fixes on a group of crocodiles. Herzog tells us that there are hundreds of crocodiles thriving in the warm waters of the biosphere, in the shadow of the nuclear reactor. And, “not surprisingly,” mutant albino crocodiles also swim and breed in the artificial environment. The white crocodiles with their eerie round pink eyes elicit an equally strange meditation from Herzog, which he voices as the viewer watches the crocodiles swim through the transparent walls of a tank:

A thought is born of this surreal environment. Not long ago, just a few ten thousands of years back there were glaciers here nine thousand feet thick. And now a new climate is steaming and spreading. Fairly soon these albinos might reach Chauvet Cave. Looking at the paintings what may they think of them? Nothing is real. Nothing is certain. It is hard to decide whether or not these creatures here are dividing into their own doppelgangers. And do they really meet or is it just their own imaginary mirror reflection? Are we today, possibly, the crocodiles who look back into an abyss of time when we see the paintings of Chauvet Cave?

A mutant albino crocodile floats – his head emerging partially from the water, his eyes fixed on the camera. The camera moves in and the movie ends in some kind of inter-special cinematic staring contest, viewer and crocodile locked into each other’s eyes.

The reaction to this postscript has been largely negative. In an otherwise positive review, Manohla Dargis of the *New York Times* states, “The cave largely keeps his more indulgently shticky side in check, save for a needlessly obfuscating coda set in a freaky research center where albino crocodiles swim in the runoff from nuclear reactor plants.”⁴⁰ Questions of fact have also been raised since the animals in question are actually alligators, imported from Louisiana, and albinism is a naturally occurring mutation. In other words, Herzog’s radio-

40 Manohla Dargis, “Herzog Finds His Inner Cave Man,” *New York Times* (April 11, 2011).

active albino crocodiles are a fantasy.⁴¹ Rather than detracting from his film, however, the ending is Herzog's own bison head on a human body, the final freakish image in a film already a quirky assemblage of ideas, sights, and sounds. His final framing of the fantastic feels like waking up from a dream with one last bizarre and incomprehensible picture lingering in our minds – this mutant albino crocodile looking directly into the camera, looking directly at us. Herzog positions the audience in the space of the second crocodile. Just like we could not tell earlier if the crocodile was looking at another crocodile or just its own image, we are asked to question where we stand in this series of objects, images and doppelgangers. Do they really meet; do we really meet? Is the albino crocodile our mirror image? Who is the doppelganger of whom?

With this curious ending, Herzog also gestures toward what may be our own curious ending – a heating planet. In his future, the mutant albino crocodiles multiply and overrun their confines, exceed our control, even escape orderly chronological time in this ecological disaster of our own making. A thought of my own is born to add another element to this already surreal meditation: I imagine Moses and these albino crocodiles meet. Together they stand in a river – the Nile, the Rhône – awash in blood and radioactive waste. As these watery plagues, sacred and profane, swirl around them, what will they make of each other? And as they turn to look at the cave paintings, what will they make of them? All of the fantastic animals call out to us to remember. The cave becomes a hall of mirrors, the Bible a kind of doppelganger of our own forgotten dreams.

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41 In an interview on "The Colbert Report" on June 6, 2011, Herzog himself admits, "It's a wild post-script, it's a wild science-fiction sort of fantasy at the end."

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Substitution Awe – Science Fiction Cinema and the Computer-Generated *Mysterium Tremendum*

Frauke Uhlenbruch

Introduction

I think we want to be in awe. We want to marvel at the huge, sublime, and unknown. But we also lead mundane lives in which the awe-ful might not make an appearance every day, so many of us provoke an encounter with it by watching others experience it in films.

At its best, portrayal of awe in popular culture may elicit an active ethical response, when we as the audience are asked to fill in the gap, when the movie does not give us an answer to the question “So, now what?” We want words and reason to fail so that we can wrestle with words and reason some more, for example, when discussing meaning or imagery of a film that refuses to be unambiguous.¹ An exquisite paradox: “No... words... They should have sent a poet,” Ellie Arroway sobs in the film version of Carl Sagan’s *Contact* (1997) after witnessing an awe-inspiring celestial event from a space-faring vehicle defying contemporaneous scientific explanation. Yet as viewers we see something on screen that inspires Ellie to express in words that she has no words. A screen-writer attempted to describe – in words – what it is that Ellie sees that makes her lose her words. Then someone else translated the words into computer-generated images. Then Jodie Foster acted in front of a green screen. And the further removed in time the film becomes, the less sophisticated the computer-generated images will seem, and the more difficult it will be to suspend our disbelief. In these filmic encounter situations in which the sublime makes words fail there is a level of remove. The viewers’ experience might be one of feeling aesthetically pleased, or entertained or excited by the plot and the thought-games of the movie, but ultimately, we are in a mundane cinema or on our mundane sofa (or in a mundane airplane seat, wedged between... ah, you may complete the image in your mind yourself). We are watching actors por-

1 One of many wonderful moments I associate with Francis Landy was an online discussion among a few friends who had all recently watched the film *Under the Skin* (2013). I recall being surprised at how different our readings were and yet how similar our reactions to specific scenes in the film. Somehow the film managed to be open enough to allow us to disagree about its “meaning” or even its actual plot, yet specific enough to evoke similar intense emotional reactions.

traying a character experiencing “creature feeling” in sublime space, which seems to be a favorite topic that draws viewers to the cinema and that has at its disposal a library of cinematic techniques and conventions that repeat themselves.

I am going to explore (using words) the way in which awe, the sublime, mystery, and creature feeling are found in the supposedly mundane entertainments that are science fiction films. I am not displeased with myself that I am going to refer to Rudolf Otto as I write about *Alien vs. Predator* (AvP; 2004) (among others), because I am still holding a small grudge that Otto would discourage those who do not self-identify as ever having had a religious experience from reading on in his *The Idea of the Holy*.² So there: I am going to cite a science fiction film widely considered to be a bit trashy as an example of the visualization of the beyond-words. I am particularly looking at the visual representation of the following tropes of science fiction film: sublime spaces and things (star ships that extend beyond the frame; repetitive patterns in caverns that never seem to end; zoom sequences); creatures lurking in sublime spaces (half-seen in shadows; too terrifying to show; terrifying at first, but kind of cute when shown and befriended); and the reactions viewers can read on the faces of the actors portraying science fiction film characters.

I hope, above all, that my conclusion will not have to be, “Hollywood uses awe and mystery to sell tickets.” A film, or a franchise, can mean a lot to a fan and there is a definite, real emotional, human involvement that goes beyond calculations of producers of how awe-inspiring the computer-generated images (CGI) need to be in order to sell; maybe substitution awe can generate a spark of recognition of real awe even from a mundane cinema seat. Maybe substitution awe and viewing somebody else's experience of “No ... words...” can actually trigger ethical thought or even positive action.

2 “The reader is invited to direct his mind to a moment of deeply-felt religious experience, as little as possible qualified by other forms of consciousness. Whoever cannot do this, whoever knows no such moments in his experience, is requested to read no further; for it is not easy to discuss questions of religious psychology with one who can recollect the emotions of his adolescence, the discomforts of indigestion, or, say, social feelings, but cannot recall any intrinsically religious feelings.” Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, trans. J.W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1923), 8.

Science Fiction, the Holy, and Creature Feeling

Rudolf Otto approaches the holy as something that is more than the words by which it is described or defined. Objectively, science fiction may be the opposite. Science fiction could be defined as a genre that often portrays a world extrapolated from the known world, in which one common trope may be that science has progressed beyond what is currently possible. As such, it is a science fiction author's job to imagine the beyond-known, the currently "unimaginable," by looking at the world that surrounds them. It is also their job to somehow render the unimaginable in words or images, novels or films.³ In this way, they may face a frustration similar to that identified by Rudolf Otto.

Many science fiction examples – enormous space ships, mysterious structures, and unpredictable aliens – have something in common with the holy of Rudolf Otto in that only aspects of them can be described and visualized, but they contain something beyond description, both in terms of the diegetic space of the film (i.e., they are often not shown entirely or evoke a response of speechlessness in a character) and in terms of their evoking a response in the viewer. In science fiction the characters in the film or story are most strongly affected by this *mysterium* that is beyond rational explanation. The viewer or reader is usually familiar enough with the conventions of cinema and with the conventions of the science fiction genre to anticipate the alien popping out of a spaceship's vent. As such, science fiction spaces are also only ever an approximation, just like Otto laments. The experience of the unimaginable does not

3 Fredric Jameson has written about this issue of science fiction in his essays "The Unknowability Thesis" and "The Alien Body," both published in *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London/New York: Verso, 2005). In "The Unknowability Thesis," Jameson writes about Stanislaw Lem's work and the way in which the completely Other is portrayed therein, skeptical that it can ever be known or described. Yet, Lem does (must?) describe the alien: "As is well-known, *Solaris* (1961) rewrites the skepticism into a more viable fable, in which a uniquely single and singular alien being – the human observers assimilate it to an ocean that covers the entirety of a remote planet bearing the title name – resists scientific inquiry with all the serene tenacity of the godhead itself (...)" (108). Or, in "The Alien Body": "such representational queries always come in one way or another up against the Chimera problem dear to British empiricism: namely, whether we can really imagine anything that is not *prius in sensu*, that is not already, in other words, derived from sensory knowledge (and a sensory knowledge which is that of our own ordinary human body and world). There are two recurrent answers to this question: in the one the "Chimera," the allegedly new thing, will be an ingeniously cobbled together object in which secondary features of our own world are primary in the new one; or else the new object will be pseudo-sensory alone, and in reality put together out of so many abstract intellectual semes which are somehow able to pass themselves off as sensory" (120).

happen to the viewer but only to the character, but also only as a substitution, because we are talking about a world of make-believe in which actors enact words written by screenplay writers. I would not deny fiction magical qualities though. A fictional universe can create an enthusiasm among fans that may be beyond rational explanation, which leads to taking action in the real world; one way is by writing fan fiction, which cannot but result in thinking about characters and communication in such an involved way that I have to assume that taking on the responsibility of writing a credible character must heighten capacities for empathy and sympathy towards non-fictional beings, too.

However, I believe that a fictional situation in which a character is thrown into an encounter situation with the *mysterium tremendum* is not necessarily ambitious about directly evoking the experience of awe, mystery, or the holy in the viewer directly. It is possible that such depictions attempt to create for the viewer or reader a surrogate-numinous experience that is lacking from the world of a viewer's actual experience. Science fiction film will not take the reader or viewer closer to Otto's *mysterium* – of course not, as Otto's *mysterium* is unapproachable and indescribable and whoever has never had a religious experience need not read further. It is possible that some science fiction struggles with a similar problem of not being able to describe its topic. Its entertainment value may be derived from its offering a substitutive experience of awe to make up for an absence of the experienced sublime and for the impossibility of describing it.

I would venture to say that science fiction films reference the experiential aspect of a numinous experience or an experience of the fascinating *mysterium tremendum* – or try to. Viewers are of course used to certain effects – they are aware that they are viewing a film. It is possible that the effect cannot be generated in a jaded entertainment-seeker, one who is always ready to point out continuity errors or microphone booms visible in a frame, exposing the manufactured-ness of the fiction. However, many science fiction films depict characters having a near-numinous experience: Ellie Arroway, for example, is a character portrayed as having dedicated her life to seeking an encounter with the mysterious alien – and when she finally does encounter it, she finds that she lacks the capacity to process and describe it. The viewer can watch on and perhaps experience vicariously, and thus might possibly simulate a mysterious experience after all.

Otto writes about the *mysterium tremendum* that it is to be found “in the atmosphere that clings to old religious monuments and buildings, to temples and to churches...”⁴ And further: “It may become the hushed, trembling, and

4 Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 12.

speechless humility of the creature in the presence of – whom or what? In the presence of that which is a Mystery inexpressible and above all creatures.”⁵ He also describes what he calls creature-feeling or creature consciousness thusly: “It is the emotion of a creature, abased and overwhelmed by its own nothingness in contrast to that which is supreme above all creatures.”⁶

Science fiction films often visualize sublime, mysterious, awe-inducing spaces as the place where a numinous experience takes place, and they substitute for the holy (or God) something visible – a tangible Other that represents the awe-inspiring, fascinating *mysterium tremendum*. The science-fictional sublime space prepares viewer and protagonist for an encounter with a non-human Other. Here, I will first think about the way in which science fiction films express “creature feeling” visually, as it clings to mysterious buildings, for the viewer to feel or for the viewer to read on a character's face. I will then consider encounter and non-encounter with the mysterious creature, how its indescribability is described and what its absence can mean: why must contemporary science fiction films more often than not reveal the alien and explain their hypothesis in pseudo-scientific terms? Why can it not stay a *mysterium*? I will conclude that substitution awe is most devastatingly demonstrated when the viewer does not get to react to the mystery or the sublime herself, but only sees the stunned reaction of another human on film, and also that sublimity and mystery combined with lack of ending or lack of alien may be a call to action.

Cinematic Sublime

Vast (contained) mysterious spaces are a recurring trope in science fiction literature and film. An inventory of examples will include the object of Arthur C. Clarke's *Rendezvous with Rama* (1973) or the tunnel of Greg Bear's *Eon* (1985) or even Ship in Kim Stanley Robinson's *Aurora* (2015). The vast space can be the mystery that is to be explored by protagonists or, as in the case of *Aurora*, it can even be the protagonist. But often the space strongly implies the expectation of an encounter with the unknown in the form of a sentient being – an expectation which can be cunningly disappointed.

In science fiction film, the focus of this article, a viewer's expectation of an encounter with an alien inside the vast contained space is often *not* disappointed. It seems like the more a film appeals to a mass market, the likelier it is

⁵ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 13.

⁶ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 10.

that we as viewers will get to see an alien antagonist. One counter example is the independent film *Cargo* (2009), discussed later, and other films whose final conclusion seems to be, “the evil you’ve been expecting to see has been yourself all along, human” (also, see below). Examples of such vast contained spaces inside of which we do encounter Other antagonists are the vast disorienting (no front or back!) Borg cubes from different *Star Trek* series, the huge *Matrix* (1999) chamber in which Neo awakes to realize that humans are kept in pods by machine overlords, and the dark hatching chambers filled with alien eggs recurring throughout the *Alien* series (including *Prometheus* [2012] and *AvP*). Then there is the vast cargo hold in the Swiss independent film *Cargo*; it is comparable to other vast spaces in visual ways which will be discussed below, however, it disappoints the expectation of an encounter with a visualized alien creature and substitutes for it a confrontation with a monstrous factual revelation.

The visual representations of these spaces in science fiction films have in common the feature of repetitive geometric or biomorphic structures that recede from the viewer’s or protagonist’s point of view, seemingly towards infinity (a common science-fictional paradox inside a limited structure) or into darkness. These on-screen spaces, in which computer-generated images create illusions of breath-taking hugeness, paradoxical size, and visual infinite regression are excellent examples of what Scott Bukatman refers to as “the cinematic sublime” in the article “The Artificial Infinite: On Special Effects and the Sublime.”⁷ Of course visual hugeness is not confined to interior or contained spaces. Bukatman (or, actually, many people to whom you start speaking about the cinematic sublime over a cup of coffee) mentions the opening shot of *Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope* (1977) as a prime example of the cinematic sublime. In this shot, the imperial starship fills the screen but does not stop at filling the screen: it is so huge that the screen cannot contain it entirely. Actually, it is quite interesting to observe the means by which cinematic technique has to limit the space and to whom in the narrative game this will be most apparent. The ship that is so huge that the cinema screen cannot contain it is clearly designed to impress the viewer. The opening sequence of *Contact* is a famous zoom sequence, pulling away from Earth into space, with radio signals becoming fainter and fewer, quieter and older, clearly aimed to demonstrate distance, silence, and emptiness to the viewer, for there is no character receding from Earth in a spaceship, only time elapses in *Erzählzeit*. Rooms so huge

7 Scott Bukatman, “The Artificial Infinite: On Special Effects and the Sublime,” in *Alien Zone II: The Spaces of Science Fiction Cinema*, ed. Annette Kuhn (London/New York: Verso, 1999), 249–275.

that their perimeters are not visible in darkness (examples below) often interface a character between space and viewer. The viewer of the film cannot see the limits of the space and the human protagonist of the film placed inside the space is another factor that characterizes the space as sublime.

Bukatman writes that the cinematic sublime hints at the experience of the truly awe-inspiring and transcendent. It hints, but it still allows the viewer cognitive or "scopic mastery".⁸ The protagonist exploring the space is in a dangerous situation: careless behavior may have fatal consequences. The viewer is not in any physical danger and can choose to look away or to leave the cinema. The cinematic sublime is a tame sublime without any actual danger to the viewer; it is at most an approximation of an encounter with a *mysterium tremendum* and thus of course not what Otto tries to put into words. It is rather like those words and analogies that, as he says, do not do the experience justice.

What is meant by cinematic sublime: awe-inspiring, overpowering, excessive, hyperbolic, uplifting, terrific, beyond articulation and comprehension (to paraphrase different theorists Bukatman references)?⁹ The attributes sound very similar to the words Otto chooses to try to circumscribe an experience of the *mysterium tremendum*, but when they appear in films they are perfectly analyzable, expected, conventional, etc. Bukatman observes that these aspects of the sublime are translated in cinema as "often not fully available to vision or description: uniformity (the similarity of all parts) and succession (a sense that the object extends on and on) characterize this obscurity."¹⁰ There are exemplary moments in the films *Prometheus* or *Cargo* that demonstrate this description of the cinematic sublime.¹¹ In *Prometheus*, the alien spaceship found and explored by humans is a gigantic horseshoe-shaped structure on a far-away planet. Neither viewer nor protagonists can see beyond the horseshoe's curve and of course it is dark, so there is a double obscurity. Drawing on HR Giger's visual design for the *Alien* series, the bending tunnel is furnished with repetitive ridges along its rounded walls, reminiscent of spines. In *Cargo* the sublime space is the cargo hold of a spaceship, considered off-limits to the crew of the spaceship. Mystery eventually drives members of the crew to enter and investigate this off-limits space: it is a geometric, square space, less organic-

8 Bukatman, "The Artificial Infinite," 250.

9 Bukatman, "The Artificial Infinite," 255.

10 Bukatman, "The Artificial Infinite," 255.

11 I would strongly recommend watching many of the films mentioned in this article if a reader is not already familiar with them (especially *Cargo* and *Contact*). *Prometheus* is emphatically not one of them: I watched it so you don't have to.

seeming than the one encountered in *Prometheus*. The group of protagonists venturing into it are shown crossing a flimsy footbridge as the camera pulls upwards to reveal how tiny the humans are compared to the space, inside of which cargo units line up and recede out of view into darkness.

Bukatman writes, further, "The sublime initiates crisis in the subject by disrupting the customary cognized relationship between subject and external reality."¹² Of course this hesitation does not happen in the viewers themselves; viewers only see the cinematic subject going through that crisis (unless maybe the viewer has just consumed a mind-altering substance, but let's assume a default sober viewer). The viewer might react with some acknowledgment that the characters are (probably) about to do something ill-advised ("don't touch that!" – "don't go in there!"). Maybe the viewer will recognize that whoever generated the CGI has copied and then pasted multiple times to make images appear to go on and on (and on). The sublime crisis is experienced by the character – that fictional receptacle of an attempt to approach the sublime and indescribable. However, no character exists without (screenplay) writer, director, or visual effects supervisor: "The precise function of SF is to create the boundless and infinite stuff of sublime experience and thus to produce a sense of transcendence beyond human finitudes..."¹³ Nice try, science fiction, but neither film nor literature can ever perfectly achieve this, because both media are dependent on words, conventions, tropes, and techniques. Maybe we have to agree with Otto and admit that our failing, finite, words are inadequate to express infinity of space or transcendence of experience. Yet we try and try again to find ciphers.

Preparing the Encounter with the *Mysterium* in Tremendous Spaces

Otto writes that the *mysterium tremendum* may be found "in the atmosphere that clings to old religious monuments and buildings, to temples and to churches..."¹⁴ I first began thinking about awe, mysterious beings and tremendous spaces in science fiction when invited to present a paper to the Archaeology of the Levant Panel at a meeting of the *European Association of Biblical Studies*, which was to focus on archaeology, temples, and sacred objects in science fiction. My original point of departure was this atmosphere of mon-

¹² Bukatman, "The Artificial Infinite," 255.

¹³ Bukatman, "The Artificial Infinite," 256.

¹⁴ Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 12.

uments, buildings, and temples. I began with an inventory of the idea of the biblical temple: the obsession with measuring and describing this structure, which is, and was, a fictional space for the majority of the existence of its idea. I thought about how tending to the sacred space requires regulations and rules, how it is so exclusive and so sensitive, so fragile yet so dangerous, and so metaphorically loaded with its courts and chambers, pillars and adornments, curtains and creatures. After that, I started brainstorming about visual representations of buildings in science fiction films that I would intuitively describe as “temple,” and I really mean that in the most literal, basic sense – for example when describing to someone the storyline of a film: “There is this scientist and he comes across this temple-thing in the desert,” etc. That is how I recruited initial examples, for example, the opening of Luc Besson's *The Fifth Element* (1997): an archaeologist is at work inside a temple-like structure, deciphering inscriptions, when a spaceship appears that towers over the already impressive temple by orders of magnitudes (alien encounter ensues). Another literal temple appears in *Alien vs. Predator*: inside Antarctica's ice, scientists hired by the Weyland corporation find a giant ziggurat-esque building, reportedly uniting temple-styles of all of Earth's cultures (alien encounter ensues). These structures are visual references to temples or are referred to as such by characters. However, the connection can be more tentative, or rather, brought more to a performative, metaphorical level, rather than an architectural, descriptive one: the way a space is approached by characters, explored, and developed can be “temple-like”, for example because of the supernatural artifacts it contains, because it has strict access limitations, because it requires particular training or particular cleanliness to enter, or because a mysterious being with tremendous powers resides inside.

In *Prometheus*, the viewer follows a crew of scientists into a structure, inside which they find vast hallways, giant statues guarding passageways, and mysterious objects of unknown function (alien encounter ensues). In my mind this became a temple. It turns out not to be one, but at first it looks like one and it “performs” like one: access is very difficult and restricted, only the cream-of-the-crop may travel to it, the scientists wear special dress (space-suits), many die because they do not behave respectfully enough inside the mysterious space. *Cargo's* cargo hold is also temple-like in terms of its properties (no alien encounter ensues): the cargo hold requires dressing in space-suits before entering which goes along with a certain preparatory ritual, and access is highly restricted to elite members of the ship's crew/society; like the other “temples,” it is huge – an overwhelmingly sublime space. It contains danger and mystery; the danger is both mechanical and due to the mysterious nature of who- or whatever is present inside this space. However, there is an

additional danger, which in this film goes beyond the scare-factor of an alien creature. The cargo hold is a “temple” that is primarily dangerous in psychological, philosophical, emotional, and political terms: the cargo hold contains such an awe-ful truth (I will spoil this later) that the person discovering this truth inside the space cannot leave the space unaffected, psychologically, emotionally, and ethically. In certain ways, this is true for all the temple-like science fiction spaces, but the creature-effect of the literal embodied alien may overshadow the philosophical effect. In most examples, something profound happens to a character when the space is approached and explored. It can happen because an encounter with an alien or a supernatural entity occurs, or because whatever is found inside the space challenges the human characters' judgment of their own goals, ethics, and what they thought of as truth and authority (as in the case of *Cargo*).

Cinematic Creature Feeling

Science fiction cinema draws on what Otto calls creature feeling both in terms of the sublime space evoked by CGI and by putting characters into an encounter situation with what to them is the unimaginably alien. Otto describes the creature feeling as “... the hushed, trembling, and speechless humility of the creature in the presence of – whom or what? In the presence of that which is a Mystery inexpressible and above all creatures.”¹⁵

Lack of humility will usually result in the death of a science fiction film character – speech will too. Quite often those who mock and behave as loudmouths (i.e., those who are not “speechless”) leading up to encounter situations are among the first to die. In *Prometheus*, one of the scientists plays cutesy with a creature encountered inside the unknown structure. He touches the creature and talks to it as one might talk to a puppy. The creature puts an end to this by inserting itself into the scientist's mouth and choking him. Those who advocate for treating the space and its inhabitants with caution and respect often survive until the end of the film. (In *Prometheus* this would be Dr. Elizabeth Shaw, played by Noomi Rapace). Similarly, Alexa Woods (played by Sanaa Lathan), an outdoor survival specialist tasked with guiding the expedition to Antarctica in *Alien vs. Predator*, ends up as the sole survivor and is the one who discourages reckless behavior throughout the film. She is in favor of enforcing strict safety rules, of working in teams, and of behaving in a level-headed way inside a mysterious building: the others get over-excited, are lone wolves, think

15 Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 13.

they know better, push mysterious buttons, and, of course, awaken the raging alien. By teaming up with the Predator aliens against a common enemy, she gains the recognition and honor of that species, previously in the franchise rather hostile to humans. Of course, again, these behavioral tropes, the speech/speechlessness, humility/non-humility are behaviors shown to the audience. Thus, the creature-feeling is only reflected off the characters towards the audience, not necessarily experienced by the audience members themselves (who, I would assume and hope, are not as naïve as to forget entirely that they are viewing a fictional creation).

Among all the alien tropes, we as viewers may see an alien in an unfamiliar-familiar form,¹⁶ a human being changed, mutated or corrupted into a threat, or (my favorite): nothing (sometimes: our own mind). Like Otto wrestling with words as only-ever near-approximations, it is probably difficult for the visual mode (nor the literary, I suppose, though that less so as its imagery is conjured up in each mind¹⁷) to express the never-before-seen. It would seem that it will always have to draw on previous visuals when creating an embodied alien; Giger's alien (so much discussed) is a case in point: its body is reminiscent of the smooth shine of an orca whale's skin; its slime, like neon porridge; its first mouth – a predator; its second mouth somehow human; its larva state arachnidic or trilobitic (also see Higgins' descriptive words in the citation above). Words are available to describe the creature and thus make more sense of it, have it become a symbol, subject it to the full arsenal of cultural, religious, psychological, psychoanalytical, etc., analyses.¹⁸ It seems like the alien defies

16 Ryan Higgins describes the Giger alien as a challenge to cognitive ease and categorization: "It has human-like arms and legs, but the wrong number of fingers and the wrong kind of feet. It has human-like teeth, but two sets of jaws and a grotesquely long skull, with no nose or eyes. Its form seems a mix of human, animal and insect, organic and inorganic. The creature's style, as designed by surrealist H.R. Giger, is 'biomechanical.' There are also connotations of human sexuality in its form and behavior, perversely combining the intimate with the unfamiliar. Although the creature is known as a 'xenomorph,' its shape is not totally foreign. Monsters, however alien, are conceived as human-nonhuman hybrids." Ryan S. Higgins, "Of Gods and Monsters: Supernatural Beings in the Uncanny Valley," in *Not in the Spaces We Know: An Exploration of the Bible and Science Fiction*, ed. Frauke Uhlenbruch, *JHebS* 16, no.9 (2016): 70-78 (71/72).

17 H.P. Lovecraft is the master of the horrific lacuna. Often in his work, the encountered horror is too horrific for words, so that each reader may conjure up his or her own worst nightmare.

18 E.g., Slavoj Žižek on *Alien: Resurrection* in the film *The Pervert's Guide to the Cinema* (2006), or the essays collected in the chapter "Repressions" and its introduction by Annette Kuhn, in *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema* (London: Verso, 1990) 91-95; Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future* (passim). In addition, see my "'Moses'

Susan Sontag's call to cease interpretation. The alien invites us to double up on interpretation. Otto, on the other hand, and creature feeling are the opposite: defying expression in words and images, defying interpretation, only leaving awed experience.

It is possible that before interpretation, the alien creature was intended as such a word-defying bringer-about of awed experience. Here we note that very often the alien appears only fragmented or half-exposed. It is common for an alien not to appear on screen long enough to grasp its bodily form sensorily. Note that you never really see the whole body of Giger's alien,¹⁹ and I suppose it is part of the creature's sublimity that it usually extends on into darkness or out of frame; this is different in the cases of e.g., the Predator aliens in *AvP* and the alien in *Super 8* (2011; see below) when they become familiar, even teammates. The alien tends to move quickly, recede from perception, reside in the shadows. One example in addition to Alexa teaming up with the Predator at the end of *AvP* appears towards the end of the film *Super 8* (a cinematic moment that completely reversed the mystery, threat, and creature-feeling established throughout the film): up until the final scenes, the alien had been a threat lurking in shadows and rear-view mirrors. It was fast, scary, and tense, but then it is exposed. It blinks with round puppy eyes and befriends the children who have discovered it, who then send it home (an *E.T.* ending). It is oddly dissatisfying. Many creature-reveals feel that way. Those moments of only hearing the alien creeping closer in a dark hallway are, I would say, tenser than the moments in which the beast is lit up in full view by ferocious gun-fire.

Otto adds the following to the description of creature-feeling or creature consciousness:

It is easily seen that, once again this phrase, whatever it is, is not a conceptual explanation of the matter. All that this new term, "creature-feeling," can express, is the note of self-abasement into nothingness before an

DVD Collection: The Bible and Science Fiction Film" in *The Bible in Motion*, vol. 1, ed. Rhonda Burnette-Bletsch (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 237-251; Rhonda Burnette-Bletsch, "Blade Runner," in *The Bible and Cinema: Fifty Key Films*, ed. Adele Reinhartz (London: Routledge, 2013), 40-45. Anton K. Kozlovic, "From Holy Aliens to Cyborg Saviours: Biblical Subtexts in Four Science Fiction Films" *Journal of Religion and Film* 5.2 (2001): <<http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/cyborg.htm>>; accessed February 22, 2015; George Aichele, "Artificial Bodies: Blade Runner and the Death of Man," in *Cinéma Divinité: Religion, Theology and the Bible in Film*, ed. S. Christianson et al. (London: SCM Press, 2005), 137-148.

19 "Alien draws some unexpected consequences from Lem's unknowability lesson: one of the unique formal features of this film is that we never see the alien completely at any stage of its growth and development." Jameson, "The Alien Body," 140.

overpowering, absolute might of some kind; whereas everything turns upon the *character* of this overpowering might, a character which cannot be expressed verbally, and can only be suggested indirectly through the tone and content of a man's feeling-response to it. And this response must be directly experienced in oneself to be understood.²⁰

If we use Otto to look at science fiction, some aliens in science fiction film take the role of demonstrating to the character their own nothingness. The audience, however, takes the role of somebody who has not experienced the feeling "in oneself."

I would say here that the cinematic sublime expressed as giant space or giant spaceship, viewed on an Imax cinema screen, attempts to elicit creature feeling in the viewer sooner than the figure of the alien. The alien as creature cannot accomplish this as much, because it is too often juxtaposed with the human character. During sweeping camera-pans of the bellies of spaceships (*Star Wars*, *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* [1979]) or the opening zoom sequence from *Contact* the audience is on its own: such fly-by shots are not usually populated with characters who emote on behalf of the audience, so the audience is left to its own awe. Often, expressing awe on behalf of the audience is one of the film's protagonist's task: the narrative may even halt for a "pronounced spectatorial position within the diegesis."²¹ Often the viewer sees the protagonist within such a sweeping, sublime film shot, as if for scale against the vastness of whatever she or he encounters. Examples can be found in *AvP* or in *Contact*. In *AvP*, an establishing shot shows the backs of the expedition crew in the foreground, behind them inside a gigantic ice cavern, an inconceivably large ziggurat-like building. In *Contact*, Ellie arrives at the observatory in Arecibo, Puerto Rico (a real-world location): we are first shown her face, then she approaches the rim of the radio telescope, embedded into the jungle, finally the camera pulls upwards to reveal Ellie with her back to the viewer, for scale in front of the giant dish. A related cinematic convention shows the viewer the protagonist's incredulous facial expression – their widening eyes, their dropping jaw – before allowing the viewer to see what the protagonist sees. In this way, "[t]he presence of the diegetic spectator stages an extended encounter with the sublime, rehearsing (and hyperbolizing) the filmic spectator's own response."²² The viewer, as I said before, is not naïve: they may use

20 Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 10. Emphasis in original.

21 Bukatman, "The Artificial Infinite," 259.

22 Bukatman, "The Artificial Infinite," 259-260.

the opportunity of their own personal dropped jaw to put some more popcorn into their mouth. In the very best cases, the viewer may be approaching an approximation of a true awe-inspiring experience, whereas the character in the film is depicted as actually having the experience. There are many examples of such moments in which the face of the actor portraying a character in a film could be considered a hyperbolization of the response intended to be elicited in the spectator: Ellie's face in *Contact* when she sees the galaxy during her space flight; the faces of the crew in *AvP* when floodlights turn on and they see the temple-building (before the viewer sees it); the crew member who sees the Predator alien for the first time. Above, I already mentioned that the creature-reveal can feel oddly unsatisfying when compared to those tense breathless moments of hearing the creature approach or seeing objects being manipulated by it. The absence of the alien body may be disappointing to creature-fans, but may actually be more satisfying when we are discussing the potential of science fiction film to elicit an experience beyond entertainment in a viewer.

Out of the film examples mentioned so far alien encounters take place in *AvP*, *Prometheus*, *The Fifth Element*, *Super 8*, *Contact* (though the alien takes on a human form to make the experience less, well, *alien* for protagonist Ellie). A film that sets up an atmosphere of mystery, sets up its sublime space, really sets up viewers to expect or at least not dismiss the possibility of an alien encounter is *Cargo*. (Other examples of similar atmosphere-building, then not-alien-delivering science fiction films are *Sunshine* (2007) and *Event Horizon* (1997), among – I'm sure – many other examples.) In *Cargo*, *Sunshine*, and *Event Horizon*, the strange and disturbing encounter that challenges a person's identity, convictions, and beliefs, is some form of themselves: other people, their own mind, the violence and horror humans are capable of inflicting upon others, greed, despair, even hope.

An alien that evokes creature-feeling comes and goes. At the end of the film, most often “we” win. “We” have fought, killed, maimed, sacrificed, evacuated airlocks, teamed up with other aliens, become honorable aliens and so on. “We” emerge as sole survivors, ready to celebrate having saved humanity. *Cargo* gives us an ethic of what must follow upon experiencing creature-feeling in a science fiction setting, probably because the evil “creature” (which in this case is deceit, greed, dis-affectedness) is not so easily gotten rid of. The beautiful thing about *Cargo* is that it establishes a cinematically sublime space with its cargo hold including our definitive features vastness, repetition, darkness, and shots in which the protagonists are shown against the huge space. The “encounter” takes place on an entirely human, ethical, philosophical level.

This is the plot of *Cargo*: Earth is uninhabitable and most surviving humans live on crowded, diseased space stations in Earth's orbit. A cargo space ship is sent on a four-year-journey to another space station to deliver supplies. The protagonist of the film is a young medical doctor, Laura Portman, who plans to use the money she will be paid for making the trip to migrate to a paradisiacal planet called Rhea, where her sister and niece already live. Only the rich and fortunate are able to escape to Rhea, which is advertised as a paradise. The cargo ship's crew take turns being frozen in cryo-sleep during the long journey. One team member is always awake for a shift of a few months. During Dr. Portman's shift, things start creaking, disappearing, and being generally mysterious. Laura investigates and someone or something moves inside the off-limits cargo hold. Laura does not have access, lacking the authority. She follows the chain of command and awakens the ship's captain, who decides an investigation squad is in order. Encounter with the sublime space is prepared in the following way: the people who are going to enter the freezing cargo hold have to suit up in an antechamber. They are only allowed in by special permission. Then they enter a giant space, which ticks all boxes of the cinematic sublime. They seem aware of the space's rules, but it contains an arbitrary factor – a stow-away – so that despite knowing the rules, one of the team is killed. The tremendous mystery inside the cargo hold is that the cargo is actually human beings, not building supplies as the crew were told. The humans are stacked neatly one on top of the other in cryo-stasis, with electrodes wired into their brains and nervous systems. They are experiencing a happy simulation of just that paradisiacal place to which Laura had hoped to move to escape toxic Earth. The crew learn that their paradise does not exist and that their dream of happiness is a simulation sold to them by a corporation. The discovery leaves the protagonists startled and changed. Each one must make ethical decisions for themselves: do they want to enter the simulation, knowing that it is one? (The old *Matrix*-question.) Should they tell those who are already in it that they are inside a simulation? Should they awaken their “cargo” and force them into a life they have chosen to leave behind? The way the crew members behave towards each other is changed after the discovery; those in favor of revealing the truth to everyone and those in favor of entering the simulation obviously engage in violence against each other. The encounter with the hardly imaginable – the only way they thought they could escape dire reality is a simulation – forces them to make an ethical decision: enter the simulation knowing that it is one or face reality and fight to restore Earth to liveable conditions. The “encounter” with that tremendous, though human, mystery has an impact on the trajectory of the story that is not told anymore as part of the film, but that may be intended as an ethical call to the viewer. The film ends with Laura

broadcasting a statement to all former Earth inhabitants, informing them that their dream-world is an illusion, that they must take responsibility and action, and work on restoring Earth. Preventing environmental disaster on Earth is hinted at as a concrete enough ethical goal for the viewer.

In a sense we are back with Otto: the space in the film is describable in cinematic and technical terms, we can analyze it in that way, but it is meant to contain an additional element that affects not only the protagonist but also the viewer by leaving a thought unfinished and by not putting it into words or images. An encounter with the hardly imaginable and the hardly describable might serve as cinematic creature-thrill, but it might also be a call to action or at least a call to thought. The startledness of losing words and the frustration of only being able to describe parts of a whole is here portrayed as an experience that is not or should not stay self-contained but bring about consequences. Often, films finish most of their thoughts for the viewer so that viewers can leave the cinema largely unaffected. Others allow themselves to really lose words by leaving a thought unfinished, by not giving all the (pseudo-scientific, science-fictional) explanations, by leaving a consequence unexplored, or by not clarifying ambivalence. This strategy (if it is a strategy and not an error) may create an unsatisfying or uncomfortable viewing experience but a more satisfying thinking experience.

Not encountering a creature that is easily dismissed, supposedly strange, but really pastiched and known seems to be quite popular in science fiction storytelling today. Not even having a creature means that it cannot be jettisoned into space or put back on its spaceship. Such stories might carry a more urgent ethical message, because they do not simply marvel at the Otherness of a creature but at the Otherness of humans themselves.²³ Both types of films can be described using words even though they attempt to portray wordlessness and awe. Both reference the *mysterium tremendum* or creature-feeling when protagonists emote on behalf of the audience and visual effects show the audience unimaginable and preternatural occurrences and spaces. They cannot generate awe or creature-feeling in its experienced form in a viewer; like

23 Francis Landy reads Jeffrey Kripal reading Rudolf Otto: “[The sacred] is thus both something subjective and external to us. The sacred is alien, and associated with all the scary phenomena and powers that fill his [Kripal’s] pages: psychic phenomena, UFOs, superheroes, channeling, and so on. At the same time, it is an intrinsic part of the psyche: ‘we are that sense of the sacred’ (italics in the original); ‘The sacred and the human are two sides of the same coin.’ In other words, that which for Otto is the ‘wholly Other’ is ourselves, and reflected in the most primitive parts of the self.” Francis Landy, “Seers, Fictions, and Other Worlds,” in *Not in the Spaces We Know: An Exploration of Science Fiction and the Bible*, ed. Fruake Uhlenbruch, *JHebS* 16, no.9 (2016): 11–29 (18–19).

Otto, it seems that they are desperate to engage with the experience of mystery, awe, the “holy,” but they too have to tiptoe around the impossibility of really explaining, describing, and then evoking that feeling. But unlike Otto, they invite a mass audience to play at the edge of that feeling, whether or not a viewer would self-report as having experienced awe before.

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PART 5

Ethics



That is Really Good: Remarks on Micah 6:8

Bob Becking

How to lead a morally decent life?¹ Despite the tendency to individualization in modern culture² and the loss of the great narratives,³ many people want to live a morally decent life. For an answer to the question: what is morally decent, there is nowadays a great lack of examples or guidelines. The end of the great narratives and the melt-down of traditional ideologies (of whatever character) not only liberated people from sultry, prescriptive morality, but also made us stand ethically naked in front of the greater questions of life.⁴ Some want to fill that void with a return to the narrow-mindedness of the post WW II era. I think that Francis Landy will agree with me that such a move is not preferable, since it would deprive us of our personal responsibilities. I therefore propose to have a look at an open-minded text from the Hebrew tradition:

He has told you, O man, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?⁵

Micah 6-7: A Josianic Reapplication

In the final chapters of the Book of Micah a different voice can be heard. This voice differs from the harsh language of unavoidable destruction in Micah 1 as well as from the interplay between salvation and doom in Micah 2-5. Over forty years ago, Van der Woude proposed a literary-critical division between (1)2-5

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- 1 It is with great pleasure that I offer my thoughts on this ancient text to Francis Landy. Once, while driving together through the Canadian Rockies, he asked me: what is it that you do (in scholarship)? I hope Francis will find an answer in this essay. Besides, since the secondary literature on the Book of Micah equals a tsunami, I had to make a choice.
 - 2 See, e.g., Z. Bauman, *Society Under Siege* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002).
 - 3 See Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir* (Paris: Minuit, 1979).
 - 4 See, e.g., Z. Bauman, *Does Ethics Have a Chance in a World of Consumers?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).
 - 5 Micah 6:8; ESV; my own translation follows later.

and 6-7.⁶ In my opinion this distinction is still valid⁷ but I do not share Van der Woude's conclusion that Deutero-Micah should be depicted as a prophet from Northern Israel living about a decade before the fall of Samaria. I propose to read this pseudepigraphic text against a different historical background, namely that of the time of King Josiah in the second half of the seventh century BCE. The text joins in the chorus of hope for the restoration of the Davidic dream of unity and for the return of the exiled Samaritans. An interesting question would be, why were these chapters added to the book of Micah in those days? My intuition would be that in circles of the Jahweh-Allein Bewegung the

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- 6 A.S. van der Woude, "Deutero-Micha: ein Prophet aus Nord-Israel?" *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 25 (1971), 365-78; he applied this view in his Dutch language commentary A.S. van der Woude, *Micah* (Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1976), 195-99. In fact, Van der Woude is reviving an old exegetical tradition, see e.g. F.C. Burkitt, "Micah 6 and 7 a Northern Prophecy", *JBL* 45 (1926): 159-61; O. Eissfeldt, "Ein Psalm aus Nord-Israel. Micha 7, 7-20," *ZDMG* 112 (1962): 259-68; J.T. Willis, "A Reapplied Prophetic Hope Oracle," in *Studies on Prophecy*, ed. P.A.H. de Boer (VT Sup 26; Leiden: Brill, 1974), 64-76.
- 7 Despite other positions, such as E. ben Zvi, *Micah* (FOTL 21B; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); J.M. O'Brien, *Micah* (Wisdom Commentary, 37; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2016) (who construe the Book of Micah as a text written in the Persian period); and J.L. Mays, *Micah* (OTS; London: SCM Press, 1976, 29-33; H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheten 4: Micha* (BK XIV/4; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1982; R. Kessler, *Micha: übersetzt und ausgelegt* (HTKAT; Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Herder, 1999), esp. 255-56; K.H. Cuffey, *The literary coherence of the book of Micah: Remnant, Restoration, and Promise* (LHB/OTS 611; New York, London: Bloomsbury, 2015), esp. 313-14; Björn Corzilius, *Michas Rätsel: Eine Untersuchung zur Kompositionsgeschichte des Michabuches* (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, 483; Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2016), esp. 385-425 (who see the Book of Micah as the end result of a complex redaction history that lasted into the Persian period). His position is contested by all those scholars who operate within the theory that the present book of the 12 minor prophets is the final result of a very complex redaction-historical process in which the texts of the various prophetic traditions influenced each other; on this Dodekapropheten-theory see, e.g., J.D. Nogalski, *Literary Precursors to the Book of the Twelve* (BZAW 217; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993); J. Wöhrle, *Die frühen Sammlungen des Zwölfprophetenbuches: Entstehung und Komposition* (BZAW 360; Berlin: de Gruyter 2006); J. Wöhrle, *Der Abschluss des Zwölfprophetenbuches: Buchübergreifende Redaktionsprozesse in den späten Sammlungen* (BZAW 389; Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 2008); R. Albertz, J.D. Nogalski, J. Wöhrle (eds), *Perspectives on the Formation of the Book of the Twelve: Methodological Foundations-Redactional Processes-Historical Insights* (BZAW 433; Berlin New York: Walter de Gruyter 2012); interesting remarks on this approach can be found in M. Roth, *Israel und die Völker im Zwölfprophetenbuch: eine Untersuchung zu den Büchern Joel, Jona, Micha und Nahum* (FRLANT, 210; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), 172-232. Van der Woude's position is adopted by J.G. Strydom, "Micah of Samaria: Amos' and Hoshea's forgotten Partner," *OTE* 6 (1993): 19-32; J. Joosten, "YHWH's Farewell to Northern Israel (Micah 6,1-8)," *ZAW* 125 (2013): 448-462.

prophet Micah was claimed to be one of the important ancestors of the movement.⁸ The addition of the two pseudepigraphic chapters can then be seen as an appropriation to the period of transition from “Manasseh” to “Josiah”.

Micah 6:1-8 Text and Translation

Let me start with my translation of these eight verses:

- 1 Hear now what YHWH is saying:
“Stand up, plead before the mountains
and let the hills hear your voice!”
- 2 Hear, o mountains, the plea of YHWH
and the perennial foundations of the earth,
since there is a strife⁹ for YHWH
with his people
and with Israel he will dispute.
- 3 “My people, what have I brought on you?¹⁰
and how did I weary you?
Answer me!
- 4 For I have brought you up from the land of Egypt,
I have ransomed you out of the house of slaves.
I have sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.
- 5 My people, remember
What Balaq, the king of Moab, advised
and what Balaam, the son of Beor, answered him.
From Shittim to Gilgal
in order to know the righteous acts of YHWH.”
- 6 “Wherewith shall I approach YHWH
and prostrate myself before God on high?

8 See B. Lang, “Die Jahwe-allein-Bewegung”, in *Der einzige Gott: Die Geburt des biblischen Monotheismus*, ed. B. Lang (München: Kosel Verlag, 1981), 47-83.

9 Note that the meaning of the word רִיב has slightly shifted between verse 1 and 2; on the semantics as well as the legal connotations of רִיב see: J. Harvey, *Le Plaidoyer prophétique contre Israël après la rupture de l’alliance* (Bruxelles: Desclée de Brouwer, 1967); K. Nielsen, *YAHWEH as Prosecutor and Judge: An Investigation of the Prophetic Lawsuit (Rib-Pattern)* (JSOT Sup, 9; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1978); J. Jensen, *Ethical dimensions of the Prophets* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2006), 133-34.

10 The construction of the verb עָשָׂה with the preposition לְ should be construed as expressing the concept “to cause someone to experience something bad.”

- Shall I approach him with burnt offerings,
 With one-year-old calves?
 7 Will YHWH be pleased with thousands of rams,
 with ten thousand streams of oil?
 Shall I give my first-born for my transgression,
 the fruit of my womb for my personal sin?"
 8 "He has told you, human, what is good
 and what YHWH requires of you:
 to do justice, to love kindness,
 and to act deliberately by walking with your God."

Micah 6:1-8 is an intriguing text in which the appropriation of the Micah-traditions to the period of king Josiah is easily detected. In the form of a judicial ordeal, the unit adapts various themes from Micah 2-5. Although the unit does only contain two words from the semantic field of trespassing, the idea as such is clearly implied. YHWH presents himself as the God who had guided the people of Israel through its darkest hours in history mirroring the implied divine conduct in the oracles of salvation in Micah 2-5. Micah 6, however, displays a different view on morality. While Micah 2-5 refers to a whole set of specific transgressions, and hence can be construed as written in the dimensions of a casuistic code, Micah 6:8 offers a basic rule that should be taken as the foundation of human conduct. Historically, this shift in moral orientation coincides with the reformation in the times of Josiah.¹¹ I construe this reformation not only as a form of political power play on behalf of the newly formed priestly elite in Jerusalem, but also as an incentive to reframe the role of the cult in connection with appeasing the divine.

¹¹ The historicity of the account in 2 Kings 22-23 is heavily debated; see, e.g., N.P. Lemche, "Did a Reform like Josiah's Happen?" in *The Historian and the Bible Essays in Honour of Lester L. Grabbe*, eds. P.R. Davies, D.V. Edelman (LHB/OTS 530; New York, London: T & T Clark, 2010), 11-19; L.A.S. Monroe, *Josiah's Reform and the Dynamics of Defilement: Israelite Rites of Violence and the Making of a Biblical Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); N. Na'aman, "The 'Discovered Book' and the Legitimation of Josiah's Reform," *JBL* 130 (2011): 47-62; R. Albertz, "Deuteronomistic History and the Heritage of the Prophets," in *Congress Volume Helsinki 2010*, ed. M. Nissinen (VT Sup 148; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 343-67; J. Blenkinsopp, "Remembering Josiah," in *Remembering Biblical Figures in the Late Persian and Early Hellenistic Periods: Social Memory and Imagination*, eds. E. Ben Zvi and D.V. Edelman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 236-56. I have no space here to defend my somewhat obsolete view that at least some changes in the religious life of Ancient Israel took place some fifty years before the Babylonian Exile.

The Composition of Micah 6

The Masoretic text in the Codex Leningradensis delimits Micah 6 with a *setumah* before verse 1, a *setumah* after verse 8, and a *petucha* after verse 16. These markers indicate that the Masoretes construed Micah 6 as containing two sub-cantos: 1-8 and 9-16. A thorough study of the layout-markers in Hebrew, Greek, Syriac, and Latin manuscripts in combination with an analysis of the poetic devices in this chapter, led Johannes de Moor to the following proposal of the composition of Micah 6:¹²

TABLE 1 *The Structure of Micah 6 according to J.C. de Moor*

Micah 6	Sub Canto	Canticle	Strophe
	A: 1-8	A.i: 1-2	A.i.1: 1
		A.ii: 3-5	A.i.2: 2
		A.iii: 6-8	A.ii.1: 3
			A.ii.2: 4
			A.ii.3 5
			A.iii.1: 6
			A.iii.2: 7
			A.iii.3: 8
	B: 9-16	B.i: 9-13	B.i.1: 9
		B.ii: 14-16	B.i.2: 10-11
			B.i.3: 12-13
			B.ii.1: 14
			B.ii.2: 15
			B.ii.3: 16

This proposal yields two questions. (1) Does the division into three canticles of sub-canto A tally with the contents of these lines? (2) Is this analysis strong enough to argue for the view that Micah 6 is to be construed as one coherent whole and not to be separated into two or three independent textual units as the mainstream of scholarship assumes?¹³

12 See J.C. de Moor, “The Structure of Micah 6 in the Light of Ancient Delimitations,” in *Layout Markers in Biblical Manuscripts and Ugaritic Tablets* (Pericope 5), eds. M. Korpel, J. Oesch (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2005), 78-113.

13 See De Moor, “The Structure of Micah 6,” esp. 90-95.

The Contents of Micah 6:1-8

Does the division into three canticles of Micah 6:1-8 make sense? In my view it does. Micah 6:1-2 contains a summons by YHWH to his people (עַמּוֹ) taking the invariably permanent elements of creation as a witness in a law-suit against his permanently variable people. The mountains on the earth and the foundations below are summoned to continue their trustworthy part on the scene of history.

Micah 6:3-5 presents a summary of the past. This textual unit resembles the deuteronomistic view on the history of Israel with its dual emphasis on the goodness of God and the trespasses of "his people." To apply a phrase coined by Ehud Ben Zvi: "God has been a good patron,"¹⁴ while Israel did not meet the divine expectations and their own promises. God's patronage is apparent in his defence plea in vv. 5-6. This historical retrospect thus refers to three important traditions: (1) the Exodus out of Egypt; (2) the inimical threat during the journey through the desert,¹⁵ and (3) the conquest of the Holy Land.¹⁶

Micah 6:7-8 can be construed as referring to the reaction of "his people." The divine plea apparently evoked a consciousness of having failed among the people of Israel. They seek to appease the divine with excessive and almost impossible gifts: thousands of rams and even the life of the firstborn child. This merchandising proposal, however, is countered with an instruction by an unmarked voice that is much more human and humane:

to do justice,
to love kindness,
and to walk perceptively with your God.¹⁷

¹⁴ Ben Zvi, *Micah*, 145.

¹⁵ See Num 22-24; see L. Schmidt, "Die alttestamentliche Bileamüberlieferung," *Biblische Zeitschrift NF* 23 (1979): 234-261.

¹⁶ Shittim was the last stopping place before the crossing of the Jordan (Josh. 3,1); Gilgal the first dwelling place in the promised land (Josh. 4,19). See, e.g., Van der Woude, *Micha*, 213; Andersen, Freedman, *Micah*, 523; J.S. Burnett, "'Going Down' to Bethel: Elijah and Elisha in the Theological Geography of the Deuteronomistic History," *JBL* 129 (2010): 281-97.

¹⁷ Mic 6:8; see T.F. Torrance, "The Prophet Micah and His Famous Saying," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 24 (1952): 206-14; H.M. Barstad, *The Religious Polemics of Amos: Studies in the Preaching of Am 2, 7B-8; 4, 1-13; 5, 1-27; 6, 4-7; 8, 14* (VT Sup, 34; Leiden: Brill, 1984), 113-114; D.R. Hillers, *Micah: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Micah* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 75-79; W. Werner, "Micha 6:8 – eine alttestamentliche Kurzformel des Glaubens: Zum theologischen Verständnis von Mi 6:8," *BiZs* 32 (1988): 232-48; Andersen, Freedman, *Micah*, 525-30; M. D. Carroll, "He Has Told You What Is Good': Moral

In sum, the division into three canticles of Micah 6:1-8 tallies with the contents of these units.¹⁸

TABLE 2 *Connections between canticle and content in Micah 6:1-8*

Canticle	Strophe
A.i: 1-2	Summons to a law-suit
A.ii: 3-5	Historical retrospect
A.iii: 6-8	Morality instead of abundant offerings

Is Micah 6 a Coherent Whole?

A vast majority of scholars divide Micah 6 into two or more parts and treat these sections as separate units (see Table 3).

De Moor's analysis of the structure of Micah 6 gives rise to the idea that this chapter could be seen as a coherent whole.¹⁹ There is, however, a minor problem with this view. As De Moor observed Micha 6:3-8 and 9-16 show an identical macrostructure of two canticles with three strophes each. This yields the question on the compositional position of Micah 6:1-2. I would like to argue that Micah 6:1-2 should be treated as a separate sub-canto introducing a twofold litigation (רִיב) in 3-8 and 9-16 (see Table 4).

Formation in Micah," in *Character Ethics and the Old Testament: Moral Dimensions of Scripture*, eds. M.D. Carroll, J.E. Lapsley (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2007), 103-18; Kessler, *Micha*, 256-72; D.L. Dreisbach, "Micah 6:8 in the Literature of the American Founding Era: A Note on Religion and Rhetoric," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 12 (2009): 91-105; J.C. de Moor, "The Structure of Micah 6," 78-113; R.T. Hyman, "Questions and response in Michah 6:6-8," *JBQ* 33 (2005): 157-65; J. Jeremias, *Die Propheten Joel, Obadja, Jona, Micha* (ATD 24; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2007), 197-205; A. Decorzant, *Vom Gericht zum Erbarmen: Text und Theologie von Micha 6-7* (FzB, 123; Würzburg: Echter-Verlag, 2010).

18 See also Ben Zvi, *Micah*, 141-42 (who however construes verse 6 to be a separate unit); M.R. Jacobs, *The Conceptual Coherence of the Book of Micah* (JSOT Sup, 322; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 156-83; B.K. Waltke, *A Commentary on Micah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 366-67; O'Brien, *Micah*, 73-93.

19 De Moor, "The Structure of Micah 6," esp. 90-95.

TABLE 3 *Division of Micah 6 by various scholars*

Mays ^a	1-5	6-8	9-16
McKane ^b	1-5	6-8	9-16
Van der Woude ^c	1-8		9-16
Wolff ^d	1-8		9-16
Hillers ^e	1-8		9-16
Kessler ^f	1-8		9-16
Andersen, Freedman ^g	1-8		9-16
Ben Zvi ^h	1-8		9-16
Jacobs ⁱ	1-8		9-16
Jeremias ^j	1-8		9-16
Waltke ^k	1-8		9-16

a Mays, *Micah*, 127-49.

b W. McKane, *Micah: Introduction and Commentary* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 177-206.

c Van der Woude, *Micha*, 200-39.

d Wolff, *Micha*, 136-73.

e Hillers, *Micah*, 75-82.

f Kessler, *Micha*, 256-83.

g F.I. Andersen, D.N. Freedman, *Micah: A New Translation with a Commentary* (AB, 24E; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 500-60.

h Ben Zvi, *Micah*, 141-65.

i Jacobs, *Conceptual Coherence*.

j Jeremias, *Die Propheten*, 196-218.

k Waltke, *A Commentary on Micah*, 342-415.

TABLE 4 *The Structure of Micah 6 according to Becking*

Micah 6	Sub Canto
	A: 1-2
	B: 3-8
	C: 9-16

This suggestion tallies with a recent proposal by Julia O'Brien. In her view "... the entirety of Mic 6 constitutes an imaged legal dispute ... in which God is both accuser and judge."²⁰ The dispute then contains two rounds of argument. In the first round (3-8) Israel is addressed as "his people." In the second round

20 O'Brien, *Micah*, 74; see already Willis, "A Reapplied Prophetic Hope Oracle"; M.A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets* (Berit Olam; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000), 346, 393-405.

more specific addresses are found: עיר, “city” (9), and מטה, “tribe” (9). In the final strophe, two kings are named for their wicked deeds: עמרי, “Omri,” and אחאב, “Ahab” (16). In the first round, the divine patronage is specified in the historical retrospect. In the second round, the trespasses of the people are specified by a set of words from the language of guilt, such as: רשע, “wickedness” (10-11), חמס, “violence” (12), שקר, “lie” (12), רמיה, “deceit” (12), חטאת, “sin” (13). The first round ends with the famous saying on moral conduct which is presented as a possible way out of doom and misery. The second round ends with a clear prophecy of doom containing a strophe resembling the futility-clauses as found in the curses in various Neo-Assyrian texts:

You will eat,
 but you will not be satisfied,
 And your vileness will be in your midst.
 You will try to remove for safekeeping,
 But you will not preserve anything,
 And what you do preserve
 I will give to the sword.
 You will sow but
 you will not reap.
 You will tread the olive but
 will not anoint yourself with oil;
 And the grapes,
 but you will not drink wine.²¹

It is remarkable to see that in both sections the verb הלך, “to go; walk,” occurs in the final strophe:

B.ii.3 (8) “to walk with your God.”
 C.ii.3 (16) “you walked in their counsels.”

There is a clear opposition between these two clauses.²² In verse 8 the moral conduct of “my people” is summoned to be anchored in the divine patronage,

21 Micah 6, 14-15; see B. Becking, “Micah in Neo-Assyrian Light,” in *Thus speaks Ishtar of Arbela: Prophecy in Israel, Assyria, and Egypt in the Neo-Assyrian Period*, eds. R.P. Gordon, H.M. Barstad (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 111-128 (with lit.).

22 This opposition can be seen as an appropriation of a comparable statement in Micah 4:5. After the visionary display of the peaceful future, a conclusion at the level of human conduct is made: “For all the peoples walk each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of YHWH, our God, forever and ever.”

while in verse 16 it is stressed that in the past ‘my people’ followed the instructions of the “statutes of Omri ... and Ahab.” This implies that the people are rebuked for putting their faith and trust in what is seen as human religious regulations allegedly derived from “other gods” whose images were erected by these kings.

These observations and their interpretations lead me to the conclusion that the conceptual coherence of Micah 6 can be formulated in parallel with the Deuteronomic choice as formulated in Deuteronomy 30:

See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of YHWH, your God, that I command you today, by loving YHWH, your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and YHWH, your God, will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it.²³

In Deuteronomy Israel is triggered to make a choice between “life” and “death.” The ריב of YHWH with “his people” results in a comparable choice between blessing and curse.

The Saying in Micah 6:8

It is important to note the following intertextual connections between Deut 30:16 and Micah 6:8. Two of the four verbs occurring in Micah 6:8 are also attested in Deut 30:16. The third verb עשה, “to do,” has a parallel in the verb שמר, “to keep.” The verb צנע Hi., “to behave prudently,” has no parallel in Deut 30:16.

TABLE 5 *Intertextual relations between Deut 30:16 and Micah 6:8*

Verb	Deut. 30	object	Micah 6	object
שמר // עשה	to keep	His commandments	to do	justice
אהב	to love	YHWH, your God	to love	loyalty
צנע	–	–	to behave modestly	–
הלך	to walk	in his ways	to walk	with your God

²³ Deut 30:15-16.

These relations underscore my assumption that it has been the function of Micah 6:8 to show “his people” a way by which to avoid doom and curse. What is, however, the outline of this road?

A quick look at the renditions of this verse, ancient and modern, Bible translations and commentaries, shows a great variety. From the variation in these translations, it becomes clear that a few syntactical and linguistic problems exist in the interpretation of Micah 6:8 which now will be discussed.

Can the verse be construed as containing a question? The first line of 6:8 clearly contains two clauses that could be read as questions: מה־טוב, “what is good?” and מה־יהוה דורש ממך, “what does YHWH ask from you?” These two clauses, however, are subordinated as accusative clauses to the main clause in the beginning of 6:8: “He has told you.” Hence, they should not be construed as interrogative clauses. מה in the two clauses should not be rendered as interrogative pronouns²⁴ but should be considered as relative indicators.²⁵ This implies that the two last lines in 6:8 do not continue an interrogative clause and hence should not be translated as such.

Is there an antithesis between 6:8a and 8b? Some translations seem to opt for this position by putting a word like “but” or “other than” at the beginning of 8b. The Hebrew conjunction כִּי has a variety of meanings and can be applied syntactically in various ways.²⁶ In Micah 6:8 כִּי should be construed as an emphatic particle having explicative force. In my view, the clauses in 6:8b give an explanation of what is good.

How to construe the verb-forms? Micah 6:8b contains four verb-forms that all are infinitives. This implies that a translation with finite verb-forms is to be rejected as an interpretative paraphrase.

Is there a ‘Wort Gottes’-theology in 6:8? Luther translated the noun משפט, “justice,” with “Gottes Wort.” Although the regulations for a proper and responsible life are spelled out in the Hebrew Bible, especially in the Pentateuch or Torah – which have often been construed as the Word of God – there are no traces of the concept of a “Wort Gottes”-theology in 6:8.

24 Thus, e.g., Andersen, Freedman, *Micah*, 503.

25 B.K. Waltke, M.P. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), § 18,2-3.

26 See, e.g., A. Schoors, “The Particle כִּי,” in *Remembering all the way: A collection of Old Testament studies published on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the Oudtestamentisch Werkgezelschap in Nederland*, ed. A.S. van der Woude (OTS 21; Leiden: Brill, 1981), 240-276; D.J.A. Clines, *DCH* IV, 383-91; E.E. Meyer, “The particle כִּי, a mere conjunction or something more?” *JNSL* 27 (2001): 39-62.

Is **הצנע** an adverb? A vast majority of translations as well as scholars render this verb-form with adverbial accusative of state: “humbly.”²⁷ An interesting exception is the rendition in the LXX: καὶ ἔτοιμον εἶναι τοῦ πορεύεσθαι μετὰ κυρίου θεοῦ σου. The majority view seems to have a ground in grammar: the infinitive absolute can function as an adverb.²⁸ It is to be remarked, however, that **הצנע** is an infinitive construct. The infinitive absolute in this clause is **לכת**. In their section on the adverbial use of infinitives, Waltke and O'Connor seem to blur the categories of infinitive construct and absolute by rendering **הצנע** with an adverb and the infinitive absolute **לכת** with an infinitive. Since the verb-form **הצנע** is followed by an infinitive, it would be more sound to translate “and to behave prudently by walking...” As for the meaning of the root **צנע** Van der Woude correctly noted that the word should be construed as a wisdom-term.²⁹ The root is also attested in texts like Prov 11:2; Sirach 16:25; 35:3. Hence, a translation with “to act prudently, deliberately” should be preferred over the traditional rendition “to act humbly.”³⁰

All these remarks and considerations lead me to the following translation of Micah 6:8:

He has told you, human, what is good
and what YHWH requires of you:
to do justice, to love kindness,
and to act deliberately by walking with your God.

Back to Our Times

What exactly does that mean? Phrased this way, that is the wrong question because it is asking for ready-made answers, while a basic attitude is referred to in the words of Micah and not the guidelines for a casuistic morality. Many

27 See also: Mays, *Micah*, 142; McKane, *Micah*, 192; Kessler, *Micha*, 271; Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets*, 400; Andersen, Freedman, *Micah*, 503; Jacobs, *Conceptual Coherence*, 183; Jensen, *Ethical dimensions*, 134; Joosten, “YHWH’s Farewell,” 450; O’Brien, *Micah*, 88.

28 See W. Gesenius, E. Kautzsch, A.E. Cowley, *Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898), § 113.2; Wolff, *Micha*, 138; Waltke, O’Connor, § 35.3.3b.

29 Van der Woude, *Micha*, 219; elaborating on an idea of J.Ph. Hyatt, “On the Meaning and Origin of Micah 6:8,” *Anglican Theological Review* 34 (1952): 232–39.

30 Van der Woude, *Micha*, 219; adopted by Wolff, *Micha*, 17 “aufmerksam”; Waltke, *A Commentary on Micah*, 343, 394: “wisely”; Hillers, *Micah*, 75–76; E. Runions, *Changing Subjects: Gender, Nation and Future in Micah* (Playing the Texts, 7; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 168; pace, e.g., D.J.A. Clines, *DCH* VII, 136–37.

people tend to think immediately of rules and regulations about what is possible and what is not and which is the best behavior. Micah grasps beyond all that by stating three basic attitudes as the beams of morality. I interpret Micah's position as an example of what Max Weber would call "ethics of disposition": a human being is personally responsible for his/her deeds and doings.³¹ The contents of "doing right" refer to an attitude that takes into account the codes of God and that does justice to other humans.³² What matters is the love of solidarity and community spirit. We are not invited to be like a loose particle going its own lonely way through the universe, but to realize that we are organically part of a larger whole and that we have our responsibilities for that larger whole. Not humility but an open eye for the Gebot der Stunde³³ would help the world to be a better place.

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- 31 M. Weber, *Politik als Beruf* (Elfte Auflage; Berlin: Duncker & Humblot), 2010.
- 32 See, e.g., Wolff, *Micha*, 156-58; Kessler, *Micha*, 271-72; Hyman, "Questions and response"; E.I. Mostovitz, N.K. Kakabadse, "He has told you, O man, what is good!" *Journal of Management Development* 31 (2012): 948-61; B. Becking, *Een dwarse dromer: Meedenken met Micha* (Woord op Zondag 14,8; Gorinchem: Narratio, 2013), 32-38; W. Dietrich, "Einübung in den aufrechten Gang: Beispiele für Zivilcourage in den Samuelbüchern," in *Openmindedness in the Bible and Beyond: A Volume of Studies in Honour of Bob Becking*, eds. M.C.A. Korpel, L.L. Grabbe (LHB/OTS 616; London, New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 57-67.
- 33 This classical rule from ethics has gained a new deepening through the works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer; see D. Bonhoeffer, *Ethik* (Herausg. von I. Tödt, H.E. Tödt, E. Feil und C. Green), Gütersloh: Gert Mohn, 1949; with E. Feil, *Die Theologie Dietrich Bonhoeffers: Hermeneutik, Christologie, Weltverständnis* (6. Auflage; Münster: LIT-Verlag, 2005); Christiane Tietz, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theologe im Widerstand* (Becks Wissen, 2775; München: CH Beck, 2013).

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A Heart to Understand: Deuteronomy 29:3 and the Recognition of the Divine

Reinhard Müller

After his long promulgation of the Deuteronomic Torah (Deut 5:1–28:68), Moses addresses the Israelites again to proclaim their “entering into the covenant of Yhwh” (29:11 [ET 29:12]). He opens this address with an astonishing statement (29:1b–3 [ET 29:2–4]):¹

(1b) You have seen all that Yhwh did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, (2) the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs, and those great wonders.

(3) *But to this day Yhwh has not given you a heart to understand, or eyes to see, or ears to hear.*²

In spite of their witnessing Yhwh’s great deeds before and during the exodus, the Israelites did not grasp their deeper meaning, because Yhwh had not yet made them able to gain such insight. According to this statement, recognizing the true character of the divine seems not to be a natural human ability but a special divine gift. This thought is highly exceptional in the book of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy’s manifold exhortations, which are related to the call “to hear” (שמע), are based on the self-evident notion that Israel is able to conceive Moses’ commandments and follow them. In Deut 29:3 (ET 29:4), this seems fundamentally to be questioned. “To this day” (עד היום הזה), the Israelites have not yet received from Yhwh “a heart to understand, or eyes to see, or ears to hear,” and therefore they are not yet able to comprehend what they have

1 It is an honor to dedicate this article to Francis Landy, dear friend and companion in reading the *T^eNaK* and reflecting on its paradoxes, see particularly his *Paradoxes of Paradise: Identity and Difference in the Song of Songs* (2d ed.; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011).

2 NRSV, adapted. The noun לב “heart” is in NRSV and many other translations rendered as “mind”; although this is an appropriate interpretive translation since the Hebrew term does not mean “the physical organ in this context” (Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* [NICOT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1976], 133 n. 2, on Deut 4:9), it is here rendered literally to highlight its semantic range in Hebrew. On the anthropological dimensions of this term, see Thomas Krüger, “Das menschliche Herz und die Weisung Gottes: Elemente einer Diskussion über Möglichkeiten und Grenzen der Tora-Rezeption im Alten Testament,” in *Das menschliche Herz und die Weisung Gottes: Studien zur alttestamentlichen Anthropologie und Ethik* (ATANT 96; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1996), 107–136.

visually and audibly perceived since the exodus and up to their arrival in the plains of Moab. However, Moses' comment seems also to imply that in the future Yhwh will remedy this deficiency; one day he will enable Israel "to understand" and act accordingly.

What is the meaning of this peculiar statement? Why does Moses refer to the people's inability to understand when proclaiming Israel's entering into Yhwh's covenant? The following considerations will show that Deut 29:3 (ET 29:4) is part of a subtle inner-biblical discussion on the human ability of recognizing and fulfilling the divine will.

Deuteronomy 29:3 in Its Immediate Context

Deuteronomy 29:3 (ET 29:4) stands in marked contrast to the preceding vv. 1b–2 (ET vv. 2b–3) that open Moses' address. The Israelites have seen with their own eyes "all that Yhwh did" in Egypt and during the exodus (vv. 1b–2 [ET vv. 2b–3]). "But to this day" they have been unable to understand (v. 3 [ET v. 4]), and their eyes with which they witnessed Yhwh's miraculous deeds (v. 2a [ET v. 3a]) have not proven to be "eyes to see," and neither are their ears "ears to hear" (v. 3a [ET v. 4a]). This contrast has a logic of its own. "Israel's possession of the organ of physical sight ... suggests the thought of its deficiency in the faculty of spiritual insight..."³ The combination of these contrasting motifs (i.e., vv. 1b–2 and 3 [ET vv. 2b–3 and 4]) must allude to the history of Israel's failures since the exodus⁴; time and again the Israelites rebelled against Yhwh (see esp. Exod 32/Deut 9:7–29 and Num 13–14/Deut 1:19–46), although they had seen with their own eyes what Yhwh had done to the Egyptians, and this proved that they were unable "to understand."

The formulaic phrase at the end of v. 3 (ET v. 4) "to this day" (עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה) suggests that this deficiency lasted until the very day of Moses' address in the

3 Samuel Rolles Driver, *Deuteronomy* (ICC; 3d ed.; Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1902), 321. Driver combines this remark with a brief comment on the position of the verse in its immediate context: "The remark is not very intimately connected with the context, and must be regarded as parenthetical"; this observation may have implications for the origins of the verse in the literary history of Deut 29–30 (see also n. 24).

4 See the explanation by Ibn Ezra: "For they had tried the Lord 10 times, and did not even recognize the wondrous feats they themselves had seen." Quoted from: *Deuteronomy דברים* (*The Commentators' Bible: The Rubin JPS Miqra'ot Gedolot*; ed. Michael Carasik; Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2015), 194.

plains of Moab, and even included this day.⁵ However, the fact that Moses addresses the listening Israelites with the message about their lack of understanding, just before proclaiming Israel's entering into Yhwh's covenant (vv. 9–14), creates a paradox. How can the Israelites be expected “to keep the words of this covenant and do them” (v. 8 [ET v. 9]), if they are still lacking “a heart to understand, and eyes to see, and ears to hear”?⁶ At least, it can be asked: when will Yhwh remedy this deficiency?

The ensuing vv. 4–5 (ET vv. 5–6) deepen this paradox. Suddenly, without an explicit introduction,⁷ Moses is quoting Yhwh:

(4) “I have led you forty years in the wilderness. The clothes on your back have not worn out, and your sandals on your feet have not worn out; (5) you have not eaten bread, and you have not drunk wine or strong drink – so that you may know that I am Yhwh your God.”

According to this saying, Yhwh's care for Israel during the forty years in the wilderness, while they were lacking bread and wine, “the standard products of human endeavor,”⁸ had the purpose of making Israel recognize him.

How does this relate to the preceding negative statement of v. 3 (ET v. 4)? Is Yhwh here superimposing his voice on Moses' voice in order to correct and contradict Moses' statement about Israel's lack of understanding?⁹ Or does the juxtaposition of these two statements (i.e., vv. 3 and 4–5 [ET vv. 4 and 5–6]) imply that even the divine pedagogy during the forty years in the wilderness failed, since Yhwh paradoxically still had not given them “a heart to

5 עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה “to this day” always denotes a state, condition, or custom that remained unaltered since a certain point of time in the past up to the very present of the readers or addressees, see, e.g., Gen 26:33; 32:33; 47:26; Deut 2:22; 11:4; 34:6; Josh 4,9; 8:28.

6 Some exegetes therefore harmonize this problem by stating that at the moment of Moses' address the Israelites receive the ability to understand, see Richard Nelson, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 340: “... the logic of the argument demands that we interpret these verses to mean that Israel is now indeed able to understand. Now that Moses has promulgated the law and encouraged obedience to it, the implications of older memories can finally be grasped.” Similarly Eckart Otto, *Deuteronomium 12–34: Zweiter Teilband*: 23,16–34,12 (HTKAT; Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2017), 2038, 2054.

7 Otto, *Deuteronomium 12–34*, 2037, notes that הִפִּיל *hip'il* in Deuteronomy is only found with Yhwh as subject, so that after the other instances 8:2, 15 and 28:36 it gets clear already from the very first word of v. 4 (ET v. 5), וְאֵלֶּכֶךְ “(and) I have led,” that Yhwh is the speaker of this sentence.

8 Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, 340.

9 Thus Otto, *Deuteronomium 12–34*, 2055–56.

understand”? A logical temporal sequence would be the idea that up to Israel’s failed conquest (Num 13–14/Deut 1:9–46) Israel lacked “a heart to understand,” while during the ensuing years in the wilderness Yhwh had been teaching the Israelites to recognize him, so that finally, on the day of Israel’s entering into the Moabitic covenant, Israel gained the ability of understanding the divine will. Yet, the text does not say so, and the sequence of vv. 3 and 4–5 (ET vv. 4 and 5–6) remains paradoxical, especially since v. 3 (ET v. 4) stresses that Israel’s perceptual deficiency lasted “to this day,” which – taken literally – must be the very day of Moses’ address to Israel.¹⁰ It seems that only at some point of time after “this day” (הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה), Israel will receive the ability of understanding. Towards the end of his large covenantal address of Deut 29–30, Moses promises that, following Israel’s repentance in the exile (30:1–2), Yhwh “will circumcise” the Israelites’ “heart” so that they will “love Yhwh ... with all [their] heart and all [their] being” (30:6). This seems Yhwh’s final act of curing Israel’s “deficiency in the faculty of spiritual insight,”¹¹ and Moses’ negative statement of Deut 29:3 (ET 29:4) seems to prepare his later promise of this future act of divine salvation.¹²

Israel’s Predetermined Apostasy and the Restoration of Israel’s Relationship to Yhwh

The triadic formulation of v. 3 (ET v. 4) runs conspicuously parallel to the famous paradoxical call of the prophet Isaiah in Isa 6:10 which is elaborately formulated in concentric fashion:¹³

Make the heart of this people dull,
and stop their ears,

10 Cf. the repeated use of הַיּוֹם “today” in Deut 29–30: Deut 29:9, 11–12, 14, 17; 30:2, 8, 11, 15–16, 18–19. The use of this adverb is a crucial element of Deuteronomy’s particular rhetoric, see the analysis by Dominik Markl, *Gottes Volk im Deuteronomium* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012), 70–79.

11 See n. 3.

12 Otto, *Deuteronomium* 12–34, 2038; see also Markl, *Gottes Volk im Deuteronomium*, 103–104.

13 This parallel has often been noted alongside Jer 5:21 see, e.g., August Dillmann, *Die Bücher Numeri, Deuteronomium und Josua* (2d ed.; Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1886), 379; Eduard König, *Das Deuteronomium: eingeleitet, übersetzt und erklärt* (KAT 3; Leipzig: A. Deichertsche Verlagsbuchhandlung Werner Scholl, 1917), 195; Carl Steuernagel, *Das Deuteronomium* (HKAT I 3.1; 2d ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1923), 156; A.D.H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy* (NCB Commentary; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1979), 361. Jer 5:21 (“Hear this, O foolish and senseless people, who have eyes, but do not see, who have ears, but do not hear...”) is however not so close to Deut 29:3 (ET 29:4) as Isa 6:10.

and shut their eyes,
 so that they may not look with their eyes,
 and listen with their ears,
 and comprehend with their heart, and turn and be healed.

Both passages refer to the “heart” (לב), the “eyes” (עינים), and the “ears” (אזנים), and unfold a similar paradoxical structure. In Isa 6:10 the paradox is even deeper than in Deut 29:3 (ET 29:4). The prophet is called *to make* his addressees *not* understand his words. This peculiar mandate is crucial for the logic of large sections of the book of Isaiah and of the Isaianic tradition.¹⁴ It aims at showing that it was Yhwh himself who predetermined from the outset that Israel did not understand Isaiah’s message. The text of Isaiah 6 however opens a perspective beyond this predetermined inability to understand. It enables its readers to take a stance outside the prevented communication between the prophet and his addressees.¹⁵

This concept seems to be adduced in Deut 29:3 (ET 29:4).¹⁶ In spite of Israel’s witnessing Yhwh’s deeds in the exodus (vv. 1b–2 [ET vv. 2b–3]), and in spite of Yhwh’s attempt of making Israel recognize him during the forty years in the wilderness (vv. 4–5 [vv. 5–6]), he did not give them “a heart to understand,” up to the very day of their entering into the Moabitic covenant. This implies that Israel’s obstinacy and rebellion before and after this day was predetermined by Yhwh.¹⁷

Yet, like in Isaiah, the readers of this text are enabled to look from the outside on Israel’s deficient spiritual insight. This is particularly indicated in the following verses. After his proclamation of Israel’s entering into the covenant

14 See Hanna Liss, *Die unerhörte Prophetie: Kommunikative Strukturen prophetischer Rede im Buch Yesha’yahu* (Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte 14; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2003); Torsten Uhlig, *The Theme of Hardening in the Book of Isaiah: An Analysis of Communicative Action* (FAT 2.39; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009); Reinhard Müller, *Ausgebliebene Einsicht: Jesajas „Verstockungsauftrag“ (Jes 6,9–11) und die jüdische Politik am Ende des 8. Jahrhunderts* (Biblich-Theologische Studien 124; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlagsgesellschaft, 2012).

15 See Reinhard Müller, “Vom verschrifteten Orakelspruch zum Prophetenbuch: Schriftliche Übermittlung göttlicher Botschaften im Licht von Jes 8,1–6 und Jes 30,8,” in *Metatexte: Erzählungen von schrifttragenden Artefakten in der alttestamentlichen und mittelalterlichen Literatur* (Materiale Textkulturen 15; ed. Friedrich-Emanuel Focken and Michael R. Ott; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016), 99–122.

16 See most recently Otto, *Deuteronomium 12–34*, 2054–55.

17 See already Abarbanel’s question: “What could Moses possibly have meant by telling them that ‘to this day the LORD has not given you a mind to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear’ (v. 3), which asserts that their rebelliousness was predetermined by God?” (*Deuteronomy* דברים, 194).

(Deut 29:9–14 [ET 29:10–15]), Moses announces what will happen if the Israelites “forsake the covenant of Yhwh” (29:24 [ET 29:25]); their land will be destroyed (29:21–22 [ET 29:22–23]), and the people will be uprooted to another country (29:27 [ET 29:28]). The more one reads this lengthy warning (29:15–27 [ET 29:16–28]), the clearer it becomes that here the exile is prophetically predicted as an inevitable fact.¹⁸ Moses’ (fictive) addressees in the world of the Deuteronomic narration, the Israelites in the plains of Moab, merge more and more with the (real) addressees of the book who live in a situation that is not identical with the biblical image of exile and diaspora but similar to it.¹⁹ Deuteronomy 29:28 (ET 29:29) even seems to give the implicit (post-)exilic addressees of Deuteronomy a voice within the book, since this peculiar statement can be best understood as a saying of these addressees who, in light of the catastrophic experiences of the past, promise to keep the Mosaic Torah forever.²⁰ The Moabitic covenant of Deuteronomy therefore covers its own transgression.²¹

The fact that Deut 29 culminates in the outlook on Israel’s “forsaking of the covenant” (29:24 [ET 29:25]) is structurally similar to Yhwh’s announcement of Israel’s apostasy in Deut 31:16–21, which leads to the promulgation of the prophetic song of Moses in Deut 32 (see Deut 31:21, 22, 29–30). Yhwh’s prediction of Israel’s apostasy includes the remark (31:21):

... For I know their inclination (יִצְרוֹ) that they are doing even now ...

This clearly alludes to the story of the flood, according to which “every inclination of the thoughts of the heart” of humankind (כָּל יִצְרָא מַחְשְׁבוֹת לִבּוֹ) is “only evil continually” (רַק רָע כָּל הַיּוֹם) (Gen 6:5; similarly 8:21).²² Moses’ promise in Deut 30:6 according to which, following Israel’s repentance in the exile (30:1–2), Yhwh will “circumcise” the Israelites’ “heart” to ensure their enduring love of him is closely related to Israel’s negative anthropological qualification in Deut 31:21 and seems to respond to it. The same holds true for the Isaianic concept of a predetermined lack of understanding, which is adduced in Deut 29:3 (ET 29:4). In other words, the three passages Deut 29:3 (ET 29:4), 30:6 and 31:21

18 See Otto, *Deuteronomium* 12–34, 2061–66.

19 See Markl, *Gottes Volk im Deuteronomium*, 101–104, who calls the implicit addressees a “reincarnation” of the Israelite generation that entered the Moabitic covenant.

20 Markl, *Gottes Volk im Deuteronomium*, 104–107; Otto, *Deuteronomium* 12–34, 2064–66.

21 See Markl, *Gottes Volk im Deuteronomium*, 101: “... der Moabbund soll ... auf sublime Weise die Möglichkeit eröffnen, seine eigene Verletzung zu überwinden.”

22 Krüger, “Das menschliche Herz und die Weisung Gottes,” 116.

share a profound skepticism about the human ability to follow the divine will.²³ The human condition of the evilness of the heart (Gen 6:5; 8:21), in which Israel participates (Deut 31:21), seems to imply that the ability of understanding and doing what God demands is a special divine gift. Therefore, it must be Yhwh himself who, at a certain point in time, gives the Israelites “a heart to understand.” Only then will the Israelites be able to keep their promise “to do all the words of this Torah forever” (Deut 29:28 [ET 29:29]).

Deuteronomy 29:3 (ET 29:4) and the Divine Gift of a New Heart

These ideas are part of a larger inner-biblical discourse.²⁴ The motif of a divinely circumcised heart (Deut 30:6) takes up the motif of a circumcision of the heart done by the human addressees themselves, which is an intensified admonition about doing the divine will, found in Deut 10:16 and Jer 4:4²⁵; in Deut 30:6 the subject of the circumcision is turned into Yhwh himself. This stands near to the promise of a new covenant in Jer 31:31–34 in which Yhwh will write the Torah on Israel’s heart (v. 33).²⁶

In Deut 29:3 (ET 29:4), the sharp paradox of Isa 6:10 is slightly smoothened since the text does not speak of “*making the heart dull* (לֵא שִׁמּוֹן *hip’il*)...” but says instead that Yhwh “has not (yet) given (לֹא נָתַן)” Israel “a heart to understand.” This formulation corresponds to the promise in Jer 32:39–40:

23 Thus Krüger, “Das menschliche Herz und die Weisung Gottes,” 116.

24 It is impossible here to contextualize the related passages Deut 29:3 (ET 29:4), 30:6 and 31:21 in a redaction-critical perspective. This would need a comprehensive analysis of the three chapters. Preliminarily, it may be suggested that Deut 30:6 reacts to 31:21, while 29:3 (ET 29:4) reacts to 30:6; all three passages are probably no original parts of the respective basic layers.

25 See also Lev 26:41; Krüger, “Das menschliche Herz und die Weisung Gottes,” 112–114.

26 On the contexts of this verse see especially Christoph Levin, *Die Verheißung des neuen Bundes: in ihrem theologieggeschichtlichen Zusammenhang ausgelegt* (FRLANT 137; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985), 257–264.

(39) *I will give* (וַנִּתֵּן) them <another>²⁷ heart and <another>²⁸ way, that they may fear me for all time, for their own good and the good of their children after them. (40) I will make an everlasting covenant with them, never to draw back from doing good to them; and I will put the fear of me in their hearts, so that they may not turn from me.

A similar promise, which additionally mentions a divine act of replacing the old heart with a new one, is found in Ezek 11:19–20 and 36:26–27:

(19) *I will give* them <another>²⁹ heart, and put a new spirit within them; I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, (20) so that they may follow my statutes and keep my ordinances and obey them.

(26) A new heart *I will give* you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. (27) I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances.

All these statements revolve around the question on how it is possible to follow the divine commandments.³⁰ In contrast to the optimistic statement in Deut 30:14 “the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to do it,” they coincide in the notion that a particular divine activity is necessary so that humankind, and Israel in particular, is able to do the divine will. Deuteronomy 29:3 (ET 29:4) is an integral part of this discourse.³¹

In light of the prophetic promises in Jer 31–32 and Ezek 11 and 36, Moses’ negative statement in Deut 29:3 (ET 29:4) “to this day Yhwh has not given you a heart to understand, or eyes to see, or ears to hear” seems to aim at the hope that at some point in the future Yhwh will finally overcome this deficiency and

27 With the LXX. MT reads לֵב אֶחָד “one heart” and דֶּרֶךְ אֶחָד “one way,” which originally may go back to a scribal error (ד-ל-confusion). The same *varia lectio* is however found in Ezek 11:19, and possibly in the proto-Masoretic tradition one passage influenced the other. The אֶחָד may have been understood as referring to Deut 6:4 (Levin, *Die Verheißung des neuen Bundes*, 203).

28 See n. 27.

29 See n. 27.

30 See Bernd Ulrich Schipper, *Hermeneutik der Tora: Studien zur Traditionsgeschichte von Prov 2 und zur Komposition von Prov 1–9* (BZAW 432; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 137–140; Henrik Pfeiffer, “Ein reines Herz schaffe mir, Gott!” Zum Verständnis des Menschen nach Psalm 51,” *ZTK* 102 (2005), 293–311.

31 Krüger, “Das menschliche Herz und die Weisung Gottes,” 114–117.

guarantee Israel's lasting obedience to his voice. As Deut 30:6 indicates, this will happen after exile and diaspora. Although such a perspective on the human ability to follow the divine will seems rather marginal in the overall context of Deuteronomy, and of the entire Pentateuch, its anthropological and theological weight can hardly be overstated.

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